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THE NEXT HORIZON

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INSANITY FAIR
DISGRACE ABOUNDING
NEMESIS?
FIRE AND BOMB (*A Pamphlet*)
A PROPHET AT HOME
ALL OUR TOMORROWS
LEST WE REGRET
DOWNFALL (*A Play*)

THE NEXT HORIZON

or

Yeomans' Progress

By

DOUGLAS REED



JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

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CHAPTER I

'WHERE the hell are my collars?' shouted Mr. Appledore Yeoman.

'Not forebe the renchild, Pip!' said Mrs. Yeoman trembling.

'Blast the renchild!' swore her Appledore, 'where have you put them?'

Mark and Patrick Yeoman looked anxiously down their noses at the untidy breakfast table and a sick feeling stirred in their stomachs. This day, after promising happy excitement, was going to be one of the woeful days, filled with their fears and their mother's tears. At the sink Mrs. Sud, the daily lady, turned, fired a glance of scorn at Appledore, raised her eyes to the ceiling, sighed noisily and resumed washing up with a defiant clatter that plainly said, 'I wish you were *my* husband; I'd show you!'

'I don't want any of your interference here, Mrs. Sud,' shouted Mr. Yeoman. Mrs. Sud calmly wiped her hands, placed them on her hips, turned again and faced him thus across the kitchen. Appledore Yeoman, standing in the doorway, was not a figure of dignity. The ravages of the night had twisted his hair into little horns; a net, anchored to his ears, covered his moustache; and hairy shanks showed beneath his long nightdress. He usually walked about his house in whatever state of dress or undress the moment found him, and once, emerging from the bathroom naked, had so encountered Mrs. Sud, whom he greeted without embarrassment and with a bland 'good morning, Mrs. Sud'. Though they were very young Mark and Patrick felt that this was odd behaviour.

'I'm not interfering with nobody, Mr. Yeoman,' said Mrs. Sud. 'I never said a word.' She was well used to subduing a bigger man than Appledore and was too much for him. Routed by her gaze he slammed the door and retreated, still swearing, to his bedroom. Mrs. Yeoman agitatedly hastened after him. They heard him pulling out drawers which he let fall on the floor with intimidating crashes. Then the uproar abated as the collars were found and Mrs. Yeoman, hand on heart, returned and sank into a kitchen chair.

'I don't know why you put up with it, mum,' said Mrs. Sud. 'Let me make you a fresh cup of tea. It'll do you good.'

'No, no, thank you, Mrs. Sud,' said Mrs. Yeoman. 'It would choke me!'

The two children dreaded this threat, which Mrs. Yeoman often made, and lived in terror lest their mother should really die of strangulation at one of their many crises.

'Choke you,' said Mrs. Sud indignantly. 'I'd choke 'im!'

'Shush, Mrs. Sud,' said Mrs. Yeoman. 'Not before the children.' Yet they felt that she liked Mrs. Sud's sympathy.

Breakfast went on, thick slices of bread and butter, jam scooped from a sticky pot, crumbs on the table, clatter-clatter at the sink, all insides quaking save Mrs. Sud's. Suddenly their nerves relaxed; father was singing! An enormous baritone voice, which sounded as if it had to fight its way past an overtight collar stud, roared out: 'When other lips and other hearts, their tales of love shall tell . . .' Mrs. Yeoman smiled nervously. The two boys, their stomachs subsiding a little, chattered impatiently. From the town the din of rejoicing came to them, muffled, through their windows.

'Will there be soldiers, mummy?' said Mark.

'Course there will, millions of soldiers,' said Patrick. He was eight and Mark was five.

'And bands?' said Mark.

The singing stopped and their father came in saying, 'Now then, are you chaps ready?'

Here was a different Appledore, the one they loved; gay, handsome and admirable. His ginger moustache, released from captivity, curled upwards like the Kaiser's. He wore his blue overcoat with the velvet collar, his overcoat of stout Melton cloth, so stiff that it would have stood upright without him inside it, and in the buttonhole, violets. His silk hat gleamed; they knew that he had preened it on his sleeve. He carried brown kid gloves with black ribbing and his heavy stick with the silver crutch.

'Come on, come on,' he cried, and the boys clambered down. 'Good-bye, Nelly,' he said, kissing her. 'We'll be back for tea.' All at once, everything was bright again. They trotted out happily with him, waving backwards at their mother, who smiled her doubtful, anxious smile after them.

'It's a ripping day,' said their father. Pulling at his hands they hurried to escape from the quiet twitten, to reach the delights that called to them. Though they were still far from the throngs and hubbub, the air about them was already quick with the vibrations of human excitement. Mark and Patrick ran impatiently beside their father; they could not reach the front soon enough and feared to miss the great procession which was to celebrate the relief of Mafeking. One thing marred Mark's happiness. He was dressed as a Scots chieftain; glengarry with streamers and feathers, velvet coat with silver buttons, sash, kilt and sporran, tartan hose and buckled shoes. He envied Patrick, who wore a blue serge suit with knee breeches, thick black stockings and heavy boots and a great straw hat like a basin. His parents little knew the misery which Mark's tribal costume caused him, for other little boys shouted after him:

There was a gay old Highlander
At the Battle of Waterloo.
The wind blew up his petticoat
And showed his cock-a-doodle-do.

He owed this dress to the influence of Queen Victoria, her Court in the Highlands and the pictures of kilted Teutonic princelings in the society journals which his mother liked. The knowledge at that time might have made him a republican for life. Together with a picture of himself, naked as a chick from the egg, which his mother loved to show to her friends, his Highland garb soured his days.

'By Jove, look at this,' said his father as they reached the front. Now they could hear the bands, but not see them because walls of people stood between them and the procession. They squeezed behind the crowds until they came to a place less tightly packed than the rest where their father begged room 'for the young 'uns', so that the people made way and even told him to go with them. Then, clasping his hands in hot excitement, the boys saw big shining instruments blown by red-faced men; marching soldiers in battle-stained khaki and others in red coats and glittering helmets. Their father bought them buttons with the Queen's picture for their lapels and paid a shilling each for them, so that the hawker touched his cap and said, 'Good luck, guv'nor; you're

a toff', and Mark and Patrick thought, how fine to have a father who was a toff.

Then there were wagons on which dying soldiers clasped the Union Jack around them and gaitered sailors charged with levelled bayonets, and nurses tended wounded men from a table on which was something that looked like a bottle of champagne. A voice near them called 'Hi, nurse, give us a drop of that!' and a great roar of laughter went up. How jolly everyone is to-day, Mark thought, how lovely is the world. Then the last band passed, blowing a brassy farewell to somebody called Bluebell, and the crowd surged into the roadway and overhead Queen Victoria's face creased on the flags as they moved in the breeze.

'We're not going home yet, father?' asked Mark anxiously.

'Home!' cried his father. 'Not likely. The fun's just beginning. Come on.'

'Coo,' said Patrick.

They went along the sea wall. On the beach the cork-blackened faces of banjo-playing minstrels grinned up at them. The buskers held out straw hats and Appledore, calling 'Here you are, boys, catch', threw penny after penny, missing the hat each time, until a little crowd gathered, laughing and applauding. Appledore, leaning over the railing, held the centre of his small stage for a moment and his sons jumped for joy. They knew that pennies were scarce at home, that Mrs. Yeoman was thankful when the gasman repaid her a few of those which she put into the meter, that their father incessantly complained about money; and now he threw it away in handfuls. That was bewildering. Nevertheless, he was a public hero, cheered by his fellows, and they shared his glory.

'Here you are, boys,' shouted Appledore, 'that's the last,' and he threw a shilling. The minstrel, grinning with his great red mouth, deftly caught it and bowed deeply. The crowd yelled delightedly and Appledore, much pleased with himself, went his way, a short man in a silk hat and a heavy blue coat, leading by the hand two excited boys.

The flags stirred faintly. The sun, unseasonably fierce on this May morning of nineteen-hundred, blistered the tarred planks on the pier. The band there mourned a little boy called Taps. Mark and Patrick's hearts were stricken by the thought of that

dead drummer boy, but on such a noon as this, in merry, mafficking England, only the children, and only the very young children at that, paused to think sadly of soldiers that died. Their shouting and cheering elders, they saw, had no time for such reflection.

It was hot down among the trousered legs and heavy, dust-fringed skirts. But Mark was happy, holding tightly to his father's hand and looking upward at red faces and distended mouths, listening to shouts of 'Good old Bobs!' and 'Good old Baden-Powell!'

Then, somewhere above them, their father said, 'You wait here, boys, and don't move'. Patrick and Mark found themselves pressed into a corner, furtively admiring the shining handles and frosted glass and polished woodwork of a swing door which clanged to behind him and presented a blank countenance to them as who should say 'Small boys should ask no questions'. They were glad when their father came out wiping his moustache, and excitedly they pulled him towards the sights of the day. They wanted to go on the pier. They wanted to see 'the nobs from London and their tarts' (one of their father's phrases) on the terrace of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. They wanted . . .

Ah, they wanted many things, but disaster came towards them in the human shape of Sergeant Sud, whom their father greeted with loud 'Hulloa'. Mark and Patrick watched anxiously. They admired all this joviality but distrusted it from sad experience. Sergeant Sud's besetting sin, they knew from arguments and talk overheard between their mother and her daily assistant, was the same as their father's, mitigated only by the fact that 'He can hold it, I must say'. Mrs. Sud shared with Mrs. Yeoman the conviction that, but for her husband's thirst, she 'need never have come down to this'. But Sergeant Sud, as they also knew from his wife's reluctant tribute, had a redeeming quality; he was a fine looking man.

He was. Mark and Patrick gazed at him in awe. His long and well turned legs were made longer by cavalryman's overalls with a broad double stripe down the side, and these strapped beneath boots on which spurs clinked. His chest strained at the ten glittering buttons of his red tunic with its yellow facings. He

carried a swagger cane with a crested silver knob and white gloves. You felt that he could have lifted you up by the two great brown handles which were his moustache. Over one ear he wore a pill-box cap and from it hung a coloured rosette.

Sergeant Sud was a recruiting sergeant. No medals decked his chest; none were to be earned in his campaigns, which were waged leaning against the walls of public houses. By the mere magnificence of his presence thus displayed, Sergeant Sud hypnotized shiftless young men so that after preliminary banter, masterful on his side and sheepish on theirs, they would go in with him, drink a pint, take a shilling and presently emerge in his company to become soldiers of the Queen. Thus, his temptations were many and his thirst an occupational risk rather than original sin. ('But after all, mum, as I always tell him, 'ee don't need to 'ave a drink with every one of 'em.')

'I don't mind if I do, sir,' said Sergeant Sud.

The swing door opened. 'Are you leaving the young gentlemen outside, sir?'

'No, let 'em all come,' cried Appledore Yeoman. Mark and Patrick looked respectfully at the company within. Ah, these lordly ones, they thought, and their lovely ladies! Men in silk hats, men in big-buttoned covert coats, soldiers. Girls in white blouses with waists pulled in and bosoms puffed out, women with enormous hats pinned on bolsters of hair. Shining handles of beer engines, like brass skittles. And behind the bar, the smallest waist, the biggest bosom, the most golden hair of all.

'Here we are again, Bella,' cried Appledore Yeoman.

'Well, you weren't away long, Mr. Yeoman. I hope I'm the attraction. Are those your little boys?'

'Yes, chips off the old block, eh? Give me a ginger beer and some biscuits for the young 'uns, first, Bella. What's yours, Sergeant?'

'Oh, I'll have a pint of the usual, thank you, sir.'

'A pint for the Sergeant, please, Bella, and a gin-and-bitters for me. Here's your health, Sergeant. How's business?'

'Thank you, sir. Business will be bad now the war's going to be over soon. The lads won't join up in peacetime.'

Mark and Patrick witnessed the passing of a pint. One moment it was there; the next it was gone and a glass with a little froth

stood on the counter, while the Sergeant, with deft forefinger, groomed his moustache. In endless procession through the years those pints would pass behind Sergeant Sud's waistline and leave it unmoved.

'Same again, please, Bella. No, a B. and S. for me this time.'

'Yes, Mr. Yeoman.'

'Your health, Sergeant. Yes, Mafeking's the beginning of the end.'

'You're right, sir. Yes, it'll be over by Christmas. We've given them Mafeking this time all right.'

'Ha-ha, we've given them Mafeking. You've got a sense of humour, Sergeant. We've taken Mafeking from them, you mean. The same again, Bella, please.'

'Has Sergeant Sud killed any Boers, Pat?'

'Course he has, thousands. He's got a Maxim and a Gatling and a horse.'

'Is he a general?'

'A kind of general.'

'Have something else this time. Have a short one.'

'No, thank you, sir. I don't like mixing the long and the short of it, I'm a vegetarian. Hops for me.'

'Ha-ha, that's a good 'un. Hops for the Sergeant, Bella. Same for me, Bella darling. Here's to you, brighteyes.'

'Now, now, Mr. Yeoman.'

'Well, good health, old boy. Here's to the widow at Windsor, God bless her. Soldiers of the *Queen*, me lads, the Queen, the Queen . . .'

'That's right, sir. Good song that. Good health, sir.'

'I bet father could be a general if he wanted to, Pat.'

'Bet you he couldn't. Don't drink all the ginger beer, greedy.'

'Bet you he could.'

'Bet you he couldn't.'

'Could, could, could, could . . .'

'Couldn't, couldn't, couldn't, couldn't . . .'

'Well, good health, old chap. You boys have shown the Boers what we're made of. Same again, Bella. Hops for Sergeant.'

'I thank you, sir. Er, will you have one with me now, sir?'

'No, no, Sud, old boy, this is on me. Bloody civilians take second place. Bella, my dear, the same again for the field marshal here. Scotch and soda for me.'

'Thank you, sir, your very good health and Mrs. Yeoman and the young gentlemen. Well, if you'll excuse me, sir . . .'

'Oh, have another, old man. Bella . . .'

'No, thank you, sir. I shall have my old lady after me if I don't get along. Good morning, sir. Good morning, young gentlemen.'

Frothy glass on counter. Perfect diction, steady gait. Swing doors swinging, closing. Mark and Patrick knew, by some strange means, that their father had been dismissed by Sergeant Sud, and they did not like it. No trust could now be placed, instinct told them, in the heartiness of Appledore's shouted good-byes, his parting exchanges with Bella and the swagger with which he strode out.

The sun was high when he stood again on the kerb with his sons. His face was bright red and his blue eyes were very pale, so that they looked like two aquamarines in a pound of steak. The crowds were noisier here and men and women, as they emerged from the swing doors, began to dance. Seven work-girls came cake-walking along the front in a line with their arms round each other's shoulders. Prancing forward, with heads down, reeling backward with heads thrown back. They wore their best clothes: tightly-bodiced, velvet dresses of red and purple and mauve and green and blue, and enormous befeathered hats.

Appledore suddenly dashed into the midst of them, separated two and placed his arms around them and came prancing down the front with them, shouting 'ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay . . .'

The girls shrieked with laughter and one of them, loosening Appledore's arm from her waist, pointed the gaze of the crowd to him and shouted, 'Look at this Johnny'. Running along the kerb, watching the onlookers for the applause their funny father deserved, Mark and Patrick kept pace with him. They had never seen him so funny before, and were hysterical with excitement. Presently he broke away from the shrieking girls and came back to them. They awaited him on the kerb dancing with excitement. 'Oo, father, you *were* funny,' cried Mark, 'you're *drunk*!'

Mark saw hatred leap into those filmy blue eyes. His hand

was seized and he was dragged off at a pace greater than his short legs could keep, while Patrick was left behind lost in the crowd.

Mark, flying through the trouser-legs and skirt flounces, was bewildered. He did not know what he had done or whither they were bound. He only realized that calamity had come upon him, that in some way it was his fault. Crying 'Where are we going, father?' he was hauled through the noisy crowd along side streets and into his quiet alleyway, through his own doorway into the place he knew as home.

Mrs. Yeoman was out. Without a word his father thrashed him with the silver crutched stick. Then Appledore went out, slamming the front door so that the walls shivered.

It was quiet in the house and cool and dim. From the town below came the muffled echo of revelry. It sounded callous, now, to the small boy in the Scottish suit who stood at the window, waiting. He had not cried. He was not much hurt. He was not even much frightened but filled with perplexity. After a long time his mother came in with a crony. He heard them laughing in the hall. Then she found him and cried out. He could not explain what had happened. All he could say was 'Father hit me'. She found the weals on his back. 'Oh, shame, shame,' she said. The neighbour raised protesting hands.

Presently Patrick came home and they all cheered up a little. In the evening, torn between the public rejoicing and their private troubles, Nelly Yeoman and her sons went to their upper window to watch the fireworks. Somewhere in the town that lay spread before them Appledore still kept patriotic festival after his fashion and as they looked down they wondered where he was and in what state he would eventually return to them. Then the rockets began to rise and to burst into red, green and golden stars that fell hissing in the sea. The 'oooh-oooh' of the crowds on the pier came faintly up to them. The old Queen's head, in fireworks, blazed up over the smooth water and then slowly grew ragged and dim and went out. The exciting day was over. All that remained of it for Mark and Patrick Yeoman as they went to bed was the flap-flap-flap of the Union Jack, fluttered by the breeze that came up from the sea so that it played a gentle tattoo on their window. It reminded them of the majesty of the empire

to which they belonged. It brought the faint echo of rub-a-dub-dubbing drums and tramp-tramp-tramping feet.

Downstairs Nelly Yeoman waited, trembling, on the home-coming of her Appledore. In South Africa the British Empire was being made mightier yet. A new century of Imperial glory was at hand; but perhaps she would have exchanged all that for a happy home and a husband in it.

CHAPTER 2

WHILE the new century began, and its second year followed the first, Mark and Patrick grew up in the twitten. Once they helped Appledore hang out the Union Jack with a black streamer tied to it. The four of them, who had so little to lose, felt bereft; the old Queen was dead. Later, they put the flag up a third time, in honour of a Coronation. Presently the boys' pocket money included new pennies with a bald and bearded head on them, and they ran with these to Mr. Dreadful's little shop to buy another week's worth of the adventures of Jack, Sam and Pete.

The change on the Throne, from strict Victorian convention to Edwardian easygoingness, was immediately reflected in the Yeomans' household. The Scottish chieftain's uniform went to the old clothes man and Mark graduated into a blue knickerbocker suit. Appledore Yeoman's silk hat and blue Melton overcoat also went. Now he wore a fawn-coloured coat and a Homburg hat with a brim that curled like a wave crest. Royal Bertie, drinking the waters of Baden or driving discreetly through the pine-forests of Bohemia to meet a lady fair at some secluded woodland café, little surmised what changes his succession had brought in the humbler homes of England.

The twitten ran, a narrow alley, between the back gardens of two rows of little houses. The fronts of these houses were like a workman's best clothes; for use on highdays and holidays only. Through their well-scrubbed front doors, with the shining knobs and letter-boxes, down the toilsomely whitened steps, came the artisans and clerks, their whaleboned and upholstered wives and their reluctant children, to go to church or chapel on Sunday.

But week-day lives were lived behind, in the back gardens and the twitten which ran between.

There Mark and Patrick on washing-day furtively studied the intimate details of Mrs. Pew's upholstery, little Emmy Pew's frilly drawers, and Mr. Pew's flesh-scourging combinations. There you smelt what Mrs. Scrub cooked for her husband's dinner and there Mrs. Spite kept a critical eye on Mrs. Slattern's dingy sheets. There Mrs. Tittle told Mrs. Tattle of the shadows she had seen on Mrs. Loveman's blind. There was the place for courting and mating, for games of cricket with a pile of coats as the wicket, or of football with two such heaps for the goal. There Mrs. Sud kept a watchful eye on her Sergeant (for was he not a fine looking man and worth her vigilance?). There pinafores Sally Sud lay in artless wait for Patrick. And there Nelly Yeoman, dreaming of her father's carriage and pair, sat at her window, watched those who came and went, and bestowed a bow on any whom she deemed to equal herself in social decline.

It was a little world and its daily routine began when the milkman reined in his pony, left his boy to mind his chariot, and came clattering along with clanking cans and yodelled 'Milk-ho!' Then the boy with the basket of rolls and loaves emerged from the bakery, which never slept (in his vagabond manhood Mark could not smell a bakery between Paris and Vienna without remembering the twitten where he grew up). The odour of cooking breakfasts spread over the gardens; from the street came the sound of double knocks, as the shakoed postman went his rounds, heavy sack over bent back; and then the back doors opened and through them came Appledore Yeoman and all the other husbands. Scarcely were they gone when Mark and Patrick and all the other children came rushing out, satchels swinging from their shoulders, and went noisily off to school.

Thereafter, save for the children's brief return at noon, the day and the twitten belonged to the housewives and to the immense and innumerable cats which lay about and, opening a narrow black chink in the amber curtains of their eyes, allowed their contempt for hurry-scurrying mankind to peep through. In the evening the morning's scene repeated itself in reverse, like a film turned backward.

Mark and Patrick might have been happy enough but for their

mother's griefs, who never knew which to fear more; that her Appledore should not return home or should come back tipsy and truculent. They lacked the indifference to domestic trouble of children bred to it. Two or three generations of moneyed ease, servants (their mother still liked to say 'Pas avant la domestique, Pip', when Mrs. Sud was present), and Victorian villadom had bequeathed to them a nervous sensitiveness which was useless here, on the border of the slums. The other boys they knew would have thought little of something which was a nightmare memory to themselves: a moment when Mrs. Yeoman, who wore on her head an arrangement of grapes, humming-birds and flowers, lacking only a glass bowl, had this knocked off by Appledore in one of his red-eyed moods.

They did not care if tufts of horsehair grew through the rickety sofa like reeds in a pond, if their carpets were in holes, if the mirror over the mantel was cracked and the gas-mantle always broken, crooked and sizzling. They were not worried by the incorrigible untidiness of their parents, who made even this mean dwelling uglier by pushing letters, postcards, socks-to-be-darned, bills and newspapers behind pictures, beneath books or cushions, down the sides of easy chairs or into drawers.

Mark and Patrick did not care about all that. When Appledore was happy, Nelly was happy, and then they were all happy, for their queer father could be gay and lovable. He told them of tennis tournaments at Bournemouth, punting parties at Henley, and even of a cricket match at Lord's in which he had played. He spoke French and opened lovely vistas to the mind's eyes of his sons when he told them about Paris, where he had spent a few months studying music. He played the piano 'with a beautiful touch' and he sang 'in a pleasant baritone'.

Indeed, Appledore rather prided himself on his playing and singing. He liked, in those placid nineteen-hundreds, to invite neighbours for 'a little music'. These were usually Mr. and Mrs. Jardine-Hake (called by Appledore behind their backs, to his sons' delight, the Garden Snakes), and Mrs. Loveman, the husbandless lady from next door. Mark was puzzled for years by his mother's remarks about Mrs. Loveman. Why, he wondered, was it wrong for Doctor Busy to drive up to Mrs. Loveman's door in a hansom cab and leave it to wait outside? What was wicked in

being 'kept'? These were mysteries, but he knew that his mother disliked Mrs. Loveman and always insisted on having the Garden Snakes, as a kind of antidote, when Appledore told her to invite Mrs. Loveman. ('After all, Nelly, she is very much alone, poor woman.' 'Oh, I think she has plenty of *visitors*, Pip!')

The Jardine-Hakes, it was understood in the Yeomans' house, like themselves belonged to a higher order and only through misfortune dwelt in the twitten. Gerald Jardine-Hake and Appledore Yeoman were both the sons of well-to-do middle-class families, who had 'gone to good schools', had sown their wild oats at the Empire, and had then been left, through the failure or withdrawal of parental support, to face the gales of life on butterfly wings. Gerald Jardine-Hake owed his livelihood to his hyphen, as a shipwrecked sailor might owe his life to a spar. Had he been just Jardine, or merely Hake, he might have drowned, but a firm of West End tailors, Messrs Tweed and Harris of Savile Row, which needed 'an outside representative' to call with patterns on retired generals, thought that Jardine-Hake looked well on a visiting card. Thus his daily round was spent between Park Lane and Bond Street, a region containing many houses of call other than those he was instructed to visit. In one of these he was always sure to meet Appledore, the 'outside representative' of Messrs Nob, Snob, and Nabob, of Berkeley Square, who dealt in Gentlemen's Country Estates and Town Mansions; these middlemen in the process of making merchants from Baghdad and pedlars from Poland into English squires well knew the allure which the redolent and resounding name, 'Appledore Yeoman', held for their customers.

Thus Appledore Yeoman and Gerald Jardine-Hake, those disappointing sons, usually travelled to town together; at frequent intervals during the day would yield themselves together to the embrace of the Woman's Arms in Mayfair; and generally returned by the same train at night.

Excitement was rare during the humdrum nineteen-hundreds and Mark and Patrick always treasured the memory of the Jardine-Hakes and Mrs. Loveman because they came for 'a little music' on the memorable evening when the Yeomans' other neighbour, Mr. Emanuel Pew, knocked on the wall! Both Appledore and his friend had returned from London that day chewing

coffee-beans, a sure sign that they had imbibed freely, and in consequence behaved towards Mrs. Loveman in an arch and playful manner, rather like elderly puppies, which deeply irritated their respective wives.

'Now then, Mrs. Loveman, let's have a song from you.'

'Oh, I really don't think I can to-night, Mr. Yeoman.'

'Come, come, no shirking.'

'Yes, please *do* sing, Mrs. Loveman.'

'Well, just one.'

Hands modestly clasped beneath tight waist-belt. Bosom and head leaned slightly towards Appledore; little booted foot tapping the opening beats. 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever . . .'

Exchange of glances between Mrs. Yeoman and Mrs. Jardine-Hake in their corner. Mutual appeal to heaven from two pairs of eyes. Will the Almighty suffer this effrontery to pass unpunished? Be *good*, indeed!

'Bravo, Mrs. Loveman. Encore.'

'Yes, do sing another, Mrs. Loveman.'

'Perhaps Mrs. Loveman's tired, Pip. Why don't you sing us something, Mr. Jardine-Hake?'

'Yes, come on, old boy, give us Drinking. But wet your whistle first.'

Two small boys watched port wine rising rosily in two glasses. In Mark's mind a seed of human understanding germinates. He begins to realize that little men of petty occupations, who live dull lives and dwell in mean streets, love to sing about the open road and the ocean waves. His father likes best the yo-heave-ho-and-the-rolling-main kind of song. The Garden Snake prefers to sing about the broad sky and the hedgerow and the great highway and the vagrant's lonely lot. They do not sing about rent and laundry bills, about the eight-ten to town and gin-and-bitters, about life in furnished rooms and the joy of touting for orders in the West End.

'Oho, daily from Southampton great steamers white and go-old . . .'

'On the road to Mandalay where the flying fishes pla-hay . . .'

'For there's no friend waiting along the highroad for a vagabond like me . . .'

Much aha and oho and yoho and heighho and heaveho. More port. 'Now then, girls.' 'No, thank you, Mr. Yeoman.' 'I've just made the cocoa, Pip.' 'Well, *you* have one, Mrs. Loveman.' 'Oh *no*, Mr. Yeoman, really I couldn't . . . Oh you are terrible . . . well, very little, then . . . I don't know what Mrs. Yeoman will think of me' (appealing glances to heaven from the corner).

Mark and Patrick love these evenings and the songs they sing. They love the rousing camaraderie of the first two verses when they are all buccaneers together rolling along under the Jolly Roger; or light dragoons riding down the Russians at Balaclava; or merry vagabonds following the sun through highway and byway. What fun it is! The shabby room vanishes and the singers, lusty fellows all, are out kissing the girls, killing England's enemies, bending to the capstan, waiting in ambush, sitting round the camp-fire: it is bliss.

But especially Mark loves the inevitable third verse in which the time of the song alters from gallop to walk, from thundering charge to dead march, in which all the soldiers lie stiff on the twilit battlefield, all the sailors are at the bottom of the sea, the bandits expire smiling, and the incorrigible vagabond dies happily under his haystack.

The songs usually end on this morbid, and yet enjoyable note, sung very softly after the bellowing of the earlier verses; though occasionally one continues into a fourth verse, an anti-climactic one in which all the corpses experience a glorious resurrection ('but they'll hear it again in a grand refrain, when Gabriel sounds the last rally . . .') Then the parted friends meet once more, the lonely tramp resumes his journey in a better world, the mariners ascend from Davy Jones' locker to a seaman's heaven. After the lament, the rejoicing; and if the Yeomans and their guests have never yet raised the roof they have more than once brought down the remains of the half-ruined gas-mantle.

'Now then, Mrs. Loveman, just a little more.'

'Oh, no, Mr. Yeoman, I couldn't, I'm not used to it. I should go all funny . . . Oh, you are terrible.'

A loud rat-a-tat-tat at the door. Mrs. Yeoman goes to the window, turns sweetly. 'Oh, it's next door. These walls are so thin, every time Mrs. Loveman has a visitor I think it's for us.

There's a hansom outside your house, I think, Mrs. Loveman.' Two small boys feel that there ought not to be a hansom outside Mrs. Loveman's house but cannot imagine *why*.

'Oh, I expect it's my brother.' Heightened colour in those rosy cheeks. 'He always comes so unexpectedly. I must go.'

'We'll see you to the door, Mrs. Loveman.'

('Her brother!')

'Shameless!'

'Always comes so unexpectedly!'

'Be good, sweet maid, forsooth!'

Indignant ocular protests to heaven.)

'Well, girls, she's gone. Nice woman. Come on, let's have another song.' Appledore sat down, struck a mighty chord, and bellowed 'I am the Bandolero . . .' and as he paused for breath a loud and indignant tap-tap-tap on the wall was heard.

Mr. Pew, the dentist, was a melancholy man of great religious fervour. To hear men singing or women laughing, to see lads and girls drawing close to each other in the gloaming, made him sad. The underwear he wore may have helped to make him gloomy, unless it was effect, not cause; that spiky suit, dancing in the wind with the rest of Mrs. Pew's washing, gave Mark, and all who saw it, goose-pimples. The Yeomans' uproar about battles and shipwrecks must have been trying indeed for this godly man separated from it only by a thin wall. However, Mr. Pew had never before ventured to protest.

Appledore, who had had several glasses of port, pressed heavily on the loud pedal. His sons and Mr. Jardine-Hake sang their heartiest. The din was terrific and through it they could hear Mr. Pew, first tapping, then rapping, then knocking, then hammering on the wall. Nelly Yeoman, who had to live with her neighbours during the daytime when Appledore was away, was torn between laughter and tears. Rosa Jardine-Hake sought for a way to lure her Gerald home. Mark and Patrick roared to burst their lungs; this was fun.

In later years Mark would wonder if that evening they gave the first shock to Mr. Pew's reason, which ultimately failed him. Perhaps they merely hastened the inevitable; in any case, after this turbulent evening Mr. Pew bought a harmonium and began to play hymns on his side of the wall every time the Yeomans

gathered for a little music on theirs. As soon as they raised their voices, they would hear his bellows wheezing and stomachic groans coming from the harmonium, and when they paused for breath they would hear the thin voices of Mr. Pew, Mrs. Pew and Emmy Pew uplifted in praise and prayer.

At last Rosa Jardine-Hake coaxed her Gerald to go home and Nelly persuaded her Appledore to desist, and the boys went to bed. As they lay in the dark, Mark spoke quietly to Patrick.

'Pat, do you think that *was* Mrs. Loveman's brother?'

'No, it was Doctor Busy.'

'Then why did she say it was her brother, Pat?'

'I dunno. Look out . . .'

Nelly Yeoman came softly in and leaned over her sons, who lay in cheap beds, their arms thrown out and their eyes closed. Years later, Mark would think of her standing by them thus and picture what passed in her mind; thoughts of her own childhood, her nursery and nursemaid, her secluded girlhood, her father's prosperous household — and this!

Nelly Yeoman, her youth fading, her hopes dwindling, her prettiness passing, crossed to the window, compressed her lips as she saw the waiting hansom, drew down the blinds and went quietly out. Mark and Patrick, as they lay waiting for sleep, heard Mrs. Loveman's door open and shut and the hansom cab drive away. Then all was quiet save for the clamour of the twitten's cats. The curtains that by day covered their eyes were now fully open and the fierce light of single-minded purpose blazed through as they prowled about: with piercing cry, if they sought a mate, in padded silence if they pursued mice. The hunt was up; the night and the twitten were theirs.

CHAPTER 3

'I *THINK* the trousers are a little long.'

'Oh, we can shorten those, ma'am. It's much better to have them a *leetle* on the long side. The young gentleman's growing fast.'

'Very well. Kindly send the suit to this address, with the collars.'

'And some dickeys, ma'am?'

'Oh yes, three dickeys, please.'

'Certainly, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Good-day, ma'am.'

Because of his Eton suit Mark would remember his ninth birthday all his life. Pearly grey trousers, neatly creased; short black jacket; white collar and black tie; in these he was as good as any lordling in the land. Later, however, when he had to wear the Eton suit to school, because he had no other, his fellows thought it an intolerable affectation and Mark came to fear their cries of 'Bumfreezer' as much as their shouted allusions to the Highlander of Waterloo.

The Eton suit was bought to enable him to make a good entry into the superior world to which, Mrs. Yeoman believed, she and hers rightly belonged. He was going, with his father, to see Grandfather Yeoman at Shepherdsmead!

This was a great occasion. Nelly Yeoman longed for her children to be restored to the silver-teapot level of society from which she was fallen and her upbringing taught her that this could only come about if, somehow, somewhen, Mark were left some money by somebody. She was devoutly religious and sure that 'God would provide', but she believed in nudging God's elbow. Now her rich father-in-law was at last to inspect her child! What woman could doubt the result of that encounter, particularly if Mark went to it looking like the hero of *Eric or Little by Little*?

Mark had less faith than his mother in his powers to charm and please. Old John Yeoman, J.P., was to him a daunting presence, compounded of the picture on their mantel, which showed a fierce old gentleman with egg-like skull, and angry eyes beneath bushes of white hair; and of the allusions of his father and mother ('Why unshould the old flintskin forpay Rickpat to go to egecoll?' 'Be fulcare, Pip, forebe the renchild.')

'Oh, Mark, you've made your face dirty again.' A moistened handkerchief rubbed on his protesting cheeks; the faint odour of his mother's saliva. 'Now, don't forget to call your grandfather sir, and if you see that he wants anything at table pass it to him, and don't forget to open the door for Mrs. Yeoman and your aunts.'

'Yes, mother.'

Mark was too young to wonder why this was his first visit to

Grandfather Yeoman, who lived but twenty-five miles away, near Tunbridge Wells, or why his mother and Patrick were not invited. He had grown up with family troubles and, without understanding them, took them for granted. Thus, he knew that Patrick had been baptized at a Catholic church, that his parents quarrelled about this, and that it caused fierce bouts of anti-Papist churchgoing in his father. At such times Appledore would emerge on Sundays from their house, dragging a reluctant Mark towards the Protestant church of St. Matthew and All Souls; and presently a tearful Mrs. Yeoman would appear, leading Patrick to the Catholic church of the Virgin Mary and All Saints. .

Sometimes Appledore's weak fury would become ludicrous and he would appear at St. Matthew and All Souls with a son in each hand, while Mrs. Yeoman remained at home, weeping. But she would retaliate by smuggling both boys to Mass during the week. This dispute, young Mark knew, though without knowing why, had something to do with the emanations of disapproval which came to them from Shepherdsmead.

It was hot. He sat on the edge of the seat in the interest of his first creased trousers. On the platform at Shepherdsmead the frock-coated station master, with his funny little hat, said 'Good day, Mr. Appledore, sir'.

The station, Mark was to learn, was still a new and exciting place in Shepherdsmead. It had only been there fifty years and there were still people in the village who had never been to London, thirty miles away, or even travelled by train at all. On one side of it Mark saw an old farmhouse, with ancient chestnuts and bulging haystacks; on the other an inn with a gaffer drinking beer on a bench. Between ran the sleepy village street, of a few shops, a cottage or two, and a church, all slumbrous in the sunshine. Between the shafts of six Victorias twelve horses nodded, and on the seats their drivers dozed. These waited to carry to their villas the portly bankers and brokers who would arrive from London, amid much hat-touching, as the sun moved towards the west. One of the drivers saluted with his whip and said, 'Good afternoon, Mr. Appledore. Miss Beatrice will be along immediately with the governess cart'.

'Hello, Bob,' cried Appledore, 'how's the cricket going?'

'Pretty fair, thank you, Mr. Appledore,' said Bob, grinning,

'they're going to give me a trial for the Sussex second eleven. Here's Miss Beatrice now.'

Clip-clop, jingle-jangle. A goddess in a close-fitting dust coat, small hat secured by veil, reins lightly held in gloved hand. Everything shining; shining brown pony, shining brasses and harness, great shining wheels with little red stripes down the spokes and shining brass hubs.

'Well, Pip, dear. How are you?' Cheek held down. 'Is this Mark? How are you, old chap? You *are* smart! Jump in, dear.'

Fascinating little step behind, for jumping in. Fascinating little door for closing after you. Fascinating cushioned seats. Reins lightly shaken and clip-clop, jingle-jangle. A blurred vision; country road, sweating in the sun, prim privet hedges and trim laurel shrubberies, gravelled drives, where gardeners bend over weeds, an old hedger straightening aged back and touching hat. Big green gates. . . .

Ah, lovely mansion! A lawn big as a cricket field. Beneath a spreading cedar tree, cool shade, and there, two more goddesses; Aunts Annie and Celia. Old Mrs. Yeoman, who, Mark knows, is not his own grandmother. ('D'you know what the Old Boy said, Nelly? He said, marrying is my hobby! Rum old devil.') On a table with a lace cloth, silver tea-things, and standing near, a capped, streamered and aproned maid.

'Well, Appledore, dear. How nice to see you. So this is Mark. Come and sit by me, Mark. How is your mother, dear? How old are you? Now say good-day to your aunts. This is Aunt Annie and this is Aunt Celia.'

'Thank you Mrs. Yeoman, mother's very well and I'm nine.' Old Mrs. Yeoman is to ask Mark innumerable times how old he is, and her habit of repeating the same question is a major mystery to him during these days. 'How-do-you-do, Aunt Annie; how-do-you-do, Aunt Celia.'

'Come on, old chap, have one of these scones. I'll spread some jam on it for you.' Aunt Beatrice is the first of the moderns. Long before the time, she cultivates a breezy, masculine manner, and always calls Mark 'old chap'. Aunt Annie and Aunt Celia keep to the mould in which they were cast.

'Your father will be here soon, Appledore. What a big boy Mark is. How old is he?'

'He's nine, Mrs. Yeoman. Small for his age, I believe.'

Grand is Mrs. Yeoman with her failing memory, through which everything passes, sieve-like, save that which she might better forget; relentlessly it retains everything unpleasant. Grand are her pince-nez, her big brooch, the gold watch on a lover's knot, her dangling chain with little gilt scissors on it.

Crunching on the gravelled drive passes Grandfather Yeoman's carriage, going to the station. On the box old Alfred Straw, father of young Bob at the station, salutes the company on the lawn. Slowly, like the heartbeats of time in the heavy stillness, the sound of his horses' hooves dwindles; and before it is quite gone is drowned by a sputtering and banging noise which grows louder and stops at the big green gates. Round the table, furtive patting of hair and tucking in of blouses.

'Mark, would you like to see a motor-car?'

'Oo yes, *please*, Aunt Beatrice.' Mark jumped from his chair and tugged his aunt's hand down the drive.

'Good afternoon, Miss Beatrice, here I am again! Is that Appledore's boy?'

'Good afternoon, Mr. Dewlap. Yes, this is Mark. Isn't he a big boy?' Mark shaped his face into the bashful smile which, he assumed, grown-ups expected when they made these mis-statements; he was among the shortest nine-year-olds at his school.

'Want to look at my motor-car, Mark?'

The governess cart was forgotten. Here was a much finer machine, with a tall young man sitting in it high above the earth, holding in his hand a wheel with a trumpet fixed to it and with long levers by his side. Behind was a wicker basket containing Mr. Dewlap's walking stick, and in front were two gleaming brass lamps with neatly trimmed wicks.

'Come, jump in, Mark, I'll show you how it goes.'

'Oh, I think perhaps you'd better not start it again, Mr. Dewlap. Tea is waiting, and father doesn't like the smell.'

'Oh, all right, Miss Beatrice. Come on then. Good afternoon, Mrs. Yeoman. Well, Appledore, how are you?'

'Hello, Albert. By Jove, you've shot up. The last time I saw you you were a kid in a velvet suit.'

'Mr. Dewlap's a captain in the Volunteers now, Pip. Such a

becoming uniform. Green and silver. He tried so hard to get out to South Africa, didn't you, Mr. Dewlap?"

'Yes, it was a great disappointment. They wouldn't let me go, you know, Appledore. Said I was too valuable here. All rot, of course.'

'Now, you know we couldn't get on without you here in Shepherdsmead, Mr. Dewlap. After all, somebody must carry on.'

'Ah, there's your father, girls. Mark, dear, here comes your grandfather. Mind you speak up, he's a little hard of hearing. How old are you, dear?'

Lazy hoofbeats, growing slowly louder. Crunch — crunch of wheels on gravel. Old Alfred Straw climbs down to open the door, leads the horses away. Across the lawn, silk-hatted, be-whiskered, baneful, leaning on his stick, comes old John Yeoman.

'Well, Martha. Girls, get me my alpaca jacket and panama hat. Well, Appledore, you here at last? How's your wife? Is this your boy? Undersized, isn't he? Albert, don't you young solicitors ever do any work? At your age I should have been in my office for another three hours yet. So would your father.'

'Oh well, it's very seldom I take an early afternoon off, Mr. Yeoman, and then only for the pleasure of coming to tea with the Misses Yeoman.'

'Grrmph! Hope you like it. All play and no work — that's been Appledore's trouble, too. I saw that beastly contraption of yours outside, Albert. You'll blow yourself up one day with that damn thing.'

'Don't you think one ought to move with the times, sir? The Volunteers like their officers to be able to drive a motor-car. They seem to think some use may possibly be made of mechanical transport in war, one day.'

'Bosh! You can't improve on horses for war.'

'I fancy these motor-cars have come to stay, guv'nor, for all that.'

'Oh, do you really think so, Pip? Mr. Dewlap's is the only one in Shepherdsmead.'

'One too many at that. Give me some tea, Martha.'

'Yes, John, dear. You know, I don't think the dear vicar quite approves of your motor-car, Albert. Everybody thought he was referring to it in his sermon last Sunday, when he spoke so

seriously about modern machines, modern morals, and the devil.'

'Silly old fool. Don't keep on quoting the parson as if he were holy writ, Martha. He'd jump on a juggernaut for a good dinner. He shows no Christian mercy towards my whisky when he comes here. You'd better get rid of that stinkbox of yours, Albert, and buy yourself a carriage and pair. What was good enough for your father ought to be good enough for you. Boy, come here. What's your name?'

'Mark, sir.'

'Mark. Well, I hope you'll learn and inwardly digest a bit more than your father. You look thin. You want feeding up. What's your mother feed you on?'

Silence. Why do grown people ask these unanswerable questions? Are they making fun of him? Bashful smile, uncomfortable wriggle.

'Don't sit there like a fool, boy. What do you like?'

Ah, simple question, easily answered. 'I like meat, sir,' says Mark.

'WHAT?'

'MEAT!'

'What the devil! Um. Ha-ha! You like meat. So do I.' An anecdote is born, which is to be told frequently in Mark's presence and to cause, inexplicably to him, much mirth; 'I asked him what he'd like to eat, and he said, I like meat! Odd little devil.'

The three goddesses, Pip and young Mr. Dewlap rise to play croquet. Mrs. Yeoman retires to the house to rest. Under the tree old John Yeoman and Mark are left alone. The shadows of the cedar lengthen. Click — click go the mallets; chatter — chatter the voices. The approach of the summer evening brings an even deeper quiet. Crunching footfalls as old Alfred Straw sets out for the Yeoman's Arms. A creaking rumble in the lane outside as the haywain goes to the farmyard. . . .

Under the dark green boughs bitter old eyes look angrily at the croquet players, while wide-open young ones watch with eager delight:

Damn young fool Dewlap with his stinkbox on wheels; damn useless girls, what chance have a brewer's daughters with a few hundreds apiece to catch husbands; damn good-for-nothing

Appledore, too lazy to make money and too stupid to marry money; damn stammering little brat, Appledore won't get me to change my will by bringing *you* here. . . .

Ah, elegant, admirable Mr. Dewlap, with your lovely motor-car; oh, exquisite laughing young aunts, how beautiful you are; handsome, witty father, how these others love you; oh, old, very old, grandfather, how frightening and how strange you are. . . .

At last balls and mallets were put away, young Mr. Dewlap drove off with loud explosions, and the moment came which Mark dreaded. His father said 'Good-bye, old chap'. He was left alone.

Mark never forgot that week of exile. Instinctively he resented these people of his own blood and intuitively he knew that they judged him by his parents' poverty. He hated the gruff remarks which old John Yeoman fired at him and the malicious questions about his mother and father with which old Mrs. Yeoman plied him. His friends, during this week, were not his own folks, but old Alfred Straw, with whom he spent happy hours in the stable, and Rosie, the little parlourmaid, who petted him and charmed him with pert allusions to Old Grumpy, his grandfather.

Rosie began that process of episodic revelation, like a dark land lit by lightning flashes, which in course of time opens a boy's eyes to the mysteries of sex. He was left alone with her one day and she said she would take him for a walk. She brushed his hair, and then, at the kitchen sink, stripped to the waist and washed. Then with the towel in her hand she turned and saw his eyes fixed on her. Perhaps she coloured a little; he seemed to remember this later.

And his other friend, old Alfred Straw, took him to the farm near the station to buy hay for the horses. It was called Yeoman's Farm and the inn opposite Yeoman's Arms, and the recurrence of his own name perplexed Mark.

'Why do they call it Yeoman's Farm, Mr. Straw?'

'Hasn't no one told you that, Mr. Mark? It used to belong to your family before they went in for the brewing, *and* the inn there, too; I wonder they didn't keep that inn. A rare lot of land round here Mr. Edward farmed in them days. That was your grandfather's father, Mr. Mark, and a good farmer he was. He sold it all when the railway came.'

‘Were you here then, Mr. Straw?’

‘Oh, aye, I was a boy then, and I worked for Mr. Edward. He couldn’t abide the railway. An angry man, he was, like your grandfather. How he used to carry on about the railway! I mind the day when they began to lay the track here. Him and my father, they watched them with their picks and shovels and he says to my father, “Tom”, he says, “I’m going to sell the farm. How can I farm with smoke and cinders all round me?” “Well, sir,” my father said, “I wouldn’t sell it, not if it was my farm, I wouldn’t. It’s as good a farm as any in Sussex, and I reckon it’ll need more’n a few cinders to spoil it.” And he was right, my father was. But Mr. Edward wouldn’t stay here when the railway came, not he. He hated railways like Mr. John hates motor-cars. But you can’t stop ’em by hating ’em.’

The only other enlivenment of this week in banishment came through the affair of grandfather’s pumpkin, and even that spread gloom all around Mark at the time.

‘Come on, old chap,’ said his Aunt Beatrice one day, ‘we’re going to decorate the church for the harvest festival, and you can help.’

They went in procession across the field and through the lych-gate; three aunts carrying baskets of flowers and fruit and old Alfred pushing an enormous pumpkin in a wheelbarrow. An ancient grey church, with squat tower and old, crooked stones in the churchyard. Within, the vicar, latest of a line reaching back to Wilfred de Broke of nearly a thousand years ago.

‘Ah, good evening, my dear young ladies. What beautiful flowers! How very good of you. Is this Appledore’s boy? What a big boy! Dear me, how time flies. It seems only yesterday . . .’

‘Now, vicar, you leave the decorations to us. Oh, and father is looking forward to seeing you at lunch on Sunday.’

‘Thank you. Goodness me, what an enormous pumpkin. Where will you put that?’

‘Oh, we’ll find a place for it. It’s father’s own choice.’

(‘You’d better take that damn pumpkin over to the church, Beatrice. I don’t know why Rodgers grows the beastly things. Cluttering up the garden.’ ‘But father, I’m sure Martin would make a lovely pumpkin pie with it.’ ‘I *hate* pumpkin pie. I wouldn’t give the things garden room, let alone table room. But

it's just the thing for the harvest festival. It'll brighten the church up. The vicar gives way too much to lilies.')

Three graceful figures, moving and talking softly in the filtered light. Deft hands arranging bunches and festoons. A small boy, awed and fidgety.

'Where on *earth* shall I put father's pumpkin, Beatrice? Mr. Straw and I can hardly lift it between us.'

'I never seed a pumpkin the like o' that in my life, miss.'

'Oh, balance it on the edge of the pulpit, Annie.'

'Beatrice, you're *dreadful*. How can you, in church? Besides, it would hide the vicar.' Titters, quickly suppressed, with side glances at Mark.

'Oh, well, put it in the font.'

'*Beatrice!*'

'Ooh, Aunt Beatrice, you are *funny*.'

'I know, let's put it on that broad window ledge. It'll look lovely with the sun falling on it, if the sun shines. Father will be able to see it there, and he'll make a scene if it isn't the chief exhibit. He's awfully proud of it, really.'

'That's a good idea, Celia, but if it falls off during the service it'll brain Lady Fridgid. That's her seat, underneath the window.'

'Oo-hoo, Aunt Beatrice, wouldn't that be *funny*, if somebody were sitting there singing praise God from whom all blessings flow with his head stuck inside a pumpkin!'

'*Mark!* Mr. Straw, will you get me some twine, I think we ought to tie it to the window handle to make quite sure.'

'I reckon wire'd be better, miss. That pumpkin weighs all of half a hundredweight.'

Slowly the days passed, and each afternoon when old John Yeoman came home, the ordeal by question was resumed.

'Well, what are you going to do when you grow up, boy?'

A shuffle and a sheepish grin. Was this meant to be funny, did the old man expect applause for his wit? How did he, Mark, know what he would do when he grew up? Nobody had told him.

'Well, haven't you anything to say?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Don't know! DON'T KNOW! Haven't you ever thought what you'd like to be?'

Ah, that was different. Of course he had. 'I'd *like* to be a drummer boy, sir.'

'Eh? WHAT?'

'A drummer boy.' Unforgettable memory of a Coronation parade and of the Royal Sussex Regiment marching and of a small boy in front with helmet and red coat and drum. What glory! Never again would Mark know such envy.

'A *drummer* boy! Don't be a fool! Who's been putting that nonsense into your head?'

Sunday came at last, and the imminent joy of home-coming. But first there were church, luncheon and tea to be overcome.

Across the fields stumped old John Yeoman, his wife, daughters and Mark. The bells pealed and the footpath was busy with people who gathered in hat-raising, bowing groups at the lych-gate and passed into the beflowered church. Service was just beginning. 'Let us pray,' they heard the vicar say. John Yeoman tramped down the aisle and into his front pew. Painfully he sat down, held his head upright while all others were bent, and looked around.

'Where's my pumpkin?'

'Shush, John!'

'What?'

'I said, shush. The service has begun.'

'Confound the service. WHERE'S MY PUMPKIN?'

Raised heads around, disapproving glances, sniggers. The vicar tried to look as if he had not heard. Mark peeped across and saw an empty place where the pumpkin had been put. He was disappointed, having lived in the hope that it would fall on somebody's head during the service.

'It must have been moved, father. It *was* over there.'

'Confounded impertinence! What does he think I sent it for?'

'Shush, John, *please*!'

Probably the vicar had never conducted a more thankless service, for John Yeoman, who at all times was prone to express audible disapproval of everything and everybody, so that solitary ladies who met him in the street shrank from his baneful gaze and his mutterings, grunted loudly and contemptuously throughout the sermon.

Afterwards they all met round the big mahogany table with John Yeoman grasping the glittering carvers; the vicar, coughing uneasily, at his right; Mrs. Yeoman, toying apprehensively with the bric-à-brac on her gold chain; the three aunts, chattering nervously in an attempt to avert the wrath to come; and Mark, perched on the edge of his chair, gazing with respect at grandfather's silver-mounted whisky decanter.

'Well, vicar' (slice, slice, slice) 'I suppose you didn't think my pumpkin good enough for your harvest decorations?'

'Oh, my dear Mr. Yeoman, on the contrary it was quite the pride of the church. But I fear it was somewhat insecurely fastened, and on Friday, during evensong, it fell on a choirboy.'

'Clumsy little devil. I suppose he was fooling about with it.'

'Oh, no, no. It was no fault of his. He was just passing. Fortunately, it only struck him a glancing blow or he might have been severely injured.'

'Nonsense. Whoever heard of anybody being hurt by a pumpkin?'

'Oh, I assure you it was an exceptionally large one. Indeed, he was unconscious for some time as it was. I must say I felt it to be a blessing from Heaven that it fell on the boy and not on Lady Fridgid who always sits beneath that window during the service. At her age, I really fear . . .'

'Ooh, Aunt Beatrice, wouldn't it have been funny if it had fallen on her head?'

'WHAT?'

'Mark!'

'GO TO YOUR ROOM, BOY, AND LEARN TO SPEAK WHEN YOU'RE SPOKEN TO.'

And that was the end of the famous visit to Shepherdsmead and of Nelly Yeoman's fond hopes. From the window of his room a hungry Mark peeped out at the empty garden, watched his kinspeople and the vicar emerge and seat themselves beneath the cedar; observed the belt-straightening and hair-patting when the sound of young Mr. Dewlap's motor-car was heard; saw his father come as the tea-table was being set. The sun shone and the croquet mallets clicked. At last the door behind him opened and Rosie came in with some apple tart saved from lunch.

'Here you are, Mr. Mark,' she said, 'you eat this. Him and his

old pumpkin! Pity it didn't fall on him. You're to come down to tea now.'

Fidgeting to be gone, Mark joined the Victorian pastoral under the cedar tree, and was happy when at last Appledore rose to leave.

'Well, good-bye, Appledore. Look after that boy of yours. He wants bringing up and bringing out. You ought to send him to boarding school.' ('Would you believe it, Nelly, the old flint-skin actually had the fernalin cheek to tell me we ought to send em-ch-ar-kay to dingboar school!')

'May I say good-bye to Rosie and Mr. Straw, Aunt Beatrice?'

'Oh, I don't think they expect that, old chap.' So he must go without taking leave of his friends; strange world!

As they went towards the station Mark felt like a prisoner freed. He was not happy in his own home, but it was bliss to be going back to it after this miserable week. As soon as they were out of earshot his father began to laugh.

'Well, you seem to have upset the old boy, Mark.'

'I didn't mean to, father. I just thought it was so funny, about the pumpkin.'

'So it was. The trouble with your grandfather is, he's been too much truckled to.' And this was true, but if anybody had told Appledore that this was precisely his own trouble he would probably have felt himself badly used, for he had a very quick eye for weaknesses, in the Old Boy, which he had inherited but to which he was quite blind in himself. The same kink, the same habit of domestic tyranny, which kept suitors away from old John Yeoman's house, and condemned his three daughters to spinsterhood, was the cause of all unhappiness in Appledore's home; but he could not see the mote in his own eye. Mark looked cautiously up at Appledore, and thought how unaccountable his father was: gloomy when you wanted him to be cheerful, unexpectedly kind and understanding when you thought he would be angry. Mark's spirits rose and he chattered about his week.

'And Mr. Straw took me to the farm to buy hay, and he said it used to belong to us, and grandfather's father sold it because the railway came.'

Appledore stopped on the bridge and looked down at the farm.

Golden evening light lay on the ancient thatch and a farmhand, with gentle 'Ee-up', drove the cows home. A train coming from London shook the bridge beneath them, blew its black smoke in their faces as it emerged, and disappeared with roar and rumble. As the smoke thinned Yeoman's Farm lay below them again, heavy with its years.

'Your great-grandfather did a bad thing that day, son,' said Appledore. 'When men sell land they uproot their children and their children's children. I hope you'll make a better job of town life than I have, Mark. I wonder what'll become of you and Pat. I'm afraid you'll have to make your own way. I shan't help you much.'

The words left an impression on Mark's mind that deepened as the years went by. They were almost the only thoughtful and heartfelt ones he ever heard from his father.

They came happily home and ate a merry supper round the kitchen table. From mahogany to deal, from silver to earthenware: however much this meant to Nelly Yeoman, it meant nothing to Mark. His fears vanished. His father and mother laughed about the pumpkin. 'Well, perhaps you shouldn't have said *that*, dear, but I don't think it was as bad as your grandfather made it out. He's a rather irritable old gentleman.'

And after supper the two boys played in the garden and Mark told his brother the whole story of the week, and especially the bit about Rosie, and Patrick, who was twelve, said 'Coo! She *didn't*!' and Mark said 'She *did*!' and Patrick said 'Sally's got big ones', and Mark said, 'Coo, how do you know, man?' and Patrick said, 'Well, I felt them when she kissed me', and Mark said 'Coo!' And as 1904 grew old he thought with dislike and distrust of his kinsfolk at Shepherdsmead, the only people of his own blood he had ever known, outside his own home, and hoped he would never have to visit them again.

CHAPTER 4

As Mark approached his teens the memory of his visit to Shepherdsmead lost its sharp outline and its awe. Of his grandfather he heard nothing more, and his Aff Aunts, thus known from the

signature to their letters, lived for him only on his birthday and at Christmas time, which brought him their joint postal order for five shillings. If Appledore sometimes dunned the Aff Aunts for a pound or two, his family knew nothing of it, and these rare communications were the only signs they had that the Aff Aunts still lived and professed to feel aff towards them.

The goodwives of the twitten, when Nelly Yeoman, bound for the shops, greeted them with her tremulous smile over their garden walls, saw an ageing little woman; a 'ladylike' one, they agreed. Infrequently she still crept to church to tell her beads, and to pray for succour in her troubles and for her sons. Appledore's fits of shouting ill-temper and complaints about their poverty-stricken lot darkened their days and Nelly Yeoman's tearful bids for the sympathy of her sons, when he was away, made matters worse. Their hearts were always heavy with sorrow for her and with resentment against him.

Their lives passed in uneventful routine, bringing small hopes and small fears in regular alternation. They liked Saturday because it was Nelly Yeoman's wealthiest day and Mark's and Patrick's holiday. Sunday was both good and bad; it brought the Sunday joint, which they liked eating, but Nelly hated cooking; it had often meant trouble about church-going; it was at best a holiday from school spoiled by the deadness of the streets and the gloom attendant upon the worship by Christians of an all-loving God. Monday was terrible for the boys because it meant school again, but welcome to their mother because it brought a respite from the stress and strain of the week-end cooking. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were the worst days of the week because they were the furthest from pay-day, the joint, and Saturday, and were therefore without compensations for any of the Yeoman family. On Friday hope revived, for then everybody had something to look forward to: Appledore his salary, Nelly her housekeeping pittance and Appledore (for whom, in spite of everything, she longed), and the boys freedom from school and a hot meat meal.

In all those little houses in the twitten, Mr. Prognose of the Public Opinion Assessment Association, if such licensed nuisances had been active in 1906, would have found little people running round and round in a similar circle of petty cares and petty

pleasures. These things, with birth, marriage and death, made up their lives. They had little else to hope for, the Yeomans and their neighbours. For that matter, they had little else to fear. They might be poor, but apparently the world meant to leave them in peace, at least, to enjoy their penury. The war was nearly forgotten in 1906; men were even becoming a little ashamed of their mafficking of 1900. The German Kaiser ('that awful man' — Nelly Yeoman), who had egged on old Uncle Paul Kruger ('that awful man' — Nelly Yeoman), was now a frequent and welcome guest in England. The French, who had shouted 'Assassin!' after inoffensive English tourists in the streets of Paris, during the war, now cordially understood us, thanks to the Peacemaker, that bald and bearded gentleman whose head was graven on Mark's and Patrick's pocket money. All was well, then; the new century promised fair and the world was settling down; the twitters had little need to fear that any outside interruption would prevent them from being happy or unhappy in their own little fashion.

The only link between them and that dim, but benevolent, outer world was forged by the weekly visit of the German band, which came on Saturdays. It was a small but very brass band. Mark and Patrick liked the musicians, smiling men who affably told the boys of the twitten that England was a third-rate country and would presently be invaded by invincible German armies, to which they belonged. The boys loved this exciting conversation and impatiently waited for the bandsmen each Saturday. Their blood was not curdled; indeed, they found the thing side-splittingly funny and in time the smiles of the bandsmen grew strained from the effort to understand the joke. These Saturday parties came to an end when one of the boys, suddenly giving way to that dervish-like excitement which sometimes seizes small boys, began to shout 'Sausage eater' at the fattest member of the quartet, who was instantly transformed from a smiling family father to an avenging Teutonic fury and, with his glittering instrument swathed round him, gave chase. He moved with astonishing speed, and the boy, his eyes starting from his head with terror, only just managed to keep beyond his reach until they reached the busy Queen's Road, where the pursuit had to be broken off. Mark did not know that he would spend much of

his life under the menace of German invasion; but when this eventually came to be so he often recalled the German bandsman, charging up his native alleyway, and felt that he had had an early foretaste of the horrors of such an event.

Next door to the Yeomans, Mrs. Loveman's goings-on still scandalized the twitten. Where Doctor Busy's hansom cab formerly waited, Dr. Busy's motor-car was now seen. Once Mrs. Loveman had driven forth in it with him, in broad daylight; Mrs. Yeoman and Mrs. Sud both happened to look out of the window at that moment and agreed, with upcast eyes, that they didn't know what they were coming to.

Mark and Patrick took keen interest in these things. Mark by now had a fragmentary idea, vague in particulars but approximately correct in general, of the end to which goings-on led, and invisible dotted lines ran from his eyes to Mrs. Loveman whenever she appeared.

'Coo, Pat, do you think she goes to bed with Dr. Busy?'

'Yes, of course she does.'

For Patrick no mysteries existed. Mark inferred that there was nothing he did not know; inferred, because Pat did not say much but implied a great deal with a few words and a mocking manner which suggested great secret reserves of knowledge. Even at fourteen, this manner of Patrick's drew the girls to him; they seemed unable to resist him, though he paid no attention to them, and came to him as if drawn by invisible strings. Perhaps it was the obvious fact that they took second place with him that lured them. Pat made it clear that he looked on girls as things to amuse himself with during idle moments. His imagination and his affections were given to other things; to his visions of adventure and his schemes for running away. He could not be snared, and this elusiveness caught the fancy of the girl whom all his friends wanted. Sally Sud was provoked by his indifference to her beck and call, and before she knew what she was about, found herself pursuing him.

For Sally, too, grew up. She was Patrick's age, fourteen, but Mark, when he looked back in later life, saw that she was even then much older than that in all save years. Nelly and Appledore both rebelled against such acquaintanceships for their sons and tried to check them; in vain, for they offered the boys no

alternative. Appledore had once met and recognized Patrick and Sally and there was a fearful scene when Patrick returned home.

'Who was that slut you were with, Pat?'

'She *wasn't* a slut.'

'Don't contradict me. Who was she?'

'I won't tell you, if you call her a slut.'

'You cheeky young devil, I've told you I won't have you running round with that little hussy. . . .'

'Pip, leave him alone. You mustn't hit him.'

'Get out of the way, you.'

Nelly crying in a corner. Patrick and his father, in grotesque embrace, staggering about the room, knocking chairs over, smashing a fireguard, finally disengaging and facing each other in shamefaced breathlessness.

'Now, let that be a lesson to you.'

'You needn't think you've hurt *me*.'

Nelly and Appledore promoted the very thing they wished to avert. Patrick's meetings with Sally became more frequent and clandestine. Mark came to know that, when Sally appeared in the offing, Patrick would disappear. He knew that they 'spooned' and was intensely curious about this, and jealous of them both.

Patrick, he believed, did all things well. Patrick was tall and had inherited Appledore's good looks; Mark was short, freckled and nondescript of feature. Patrick was fearless and bold; Mark was shy. And now, Patrick had far outstripped Mark in the process of revelation which, for Mark, began with Rosie; he did not say so, but Mark assumed this from the way he left things unsaid. In his eyes Patrick was heroic. Not even Buffalo Bill could supplant him; that Buffalo Bill whom these two together saw one evening, cantering round a lamplit arena and smashing, with shots from a Winchester rifle held in one hand, glass balls as they were thrown into the air.

The brothers lived for Saturday, respite from school, liberty. Then they lay on cool grass and watched good old Ranji and good old Fry hit boundaries for Sussex; or they wandered about the sleepy harbour of Shoreham talking of ships and pirates; or they rode on the little undercliff railway to Kemp Town and from there walked over the tall cliffs to Rottingdean. These white walls spread with soft green turf were a balcony from which

they gazed at the romantic universe of Arabs, Red Indians and buccaneers, of Zulu Impis and coral islands. The glinting waves, the ships rolling among them and the gales that blew all spelt high adventure. They pictured Captain Kidd (with Patrick and Mark as his cabin boys) riding those seas or made out of some big black cloud a beleaguered British redoubt where the drummer boys (Patrick and Mark) with bloodstained bandages round their heads, fought to the last alongside British redcoats.

Mark, when he returned to England in later life, would feel a physical impulse to caress these white cliffs, to fondle this age-old and ageless green turf. But when these brothers lay on them, and looked out, they thought only of running away. Patrick, the stronger brother, impatiently meant to go, and soon. Mark shared his brother's dreams but could not really imagine himself breaking loose from the twitten and his home.

'Look at that liner, Pat.'

'That's not a liner, man. That's a cargo ship.'

'How do you know?'

'Liners have the funnels in the middle.'

'Are you really going to run away to sea one day, Pat?'

'Yes, I am. What's the good of staying here? I don't want to get like father.'

Mark's heart sank. For all the oppressive unhappiness of his home, he dared not imagine it broken up, and hated Patrick's continual talk of going away. He loved them all, and wanted them to be always together. He wished their family had been bigger. He envied other boys who had many kindly aunts and uncles and numerous cousins. He and Patrick only had their Aff Aunts and these they would gladly have given away.

'But won't you miss us, Pat? Won't you mind leaving mother?'

'I can't help all that. I want to get away from here. I'll make a lot of money and come back for you and mother.'

'What about father?'

'I hate father. The only thing he can do is to make mother miserable. I'll go for him when I get bigger.'

'Sometimes he's all right.'

'He ought to be always all right.'

'Where will you go?'

'I want to go to Australia and the South Sea Islands. Anyway,

I won't stay here. I'm going to get out of this. I want to be free. I'm not going to be a shop boy or a clerk. I'll be leaving school next year, and what am I going to do? Father wouldn't let me go in the navy like I wanted.' In this Appledore had been supported by Nelly Yeoman, in whose sorrowful eyes an office boy was still a little nearer gentility than a ship's boy. 'They won't get me to stay in an office.'

It was on one of these Saturdays, when they lay together on the cliff top, that Sally came upon them.

'Hullo, Pat.'

They turned where they lay and looked up at Sally Sud. The turf, which told no tales, had allowed her to steal upon them. She smiled down on them, a woman of fourteen years, pressing against the wind, which carved the rounded outline of her legs. Her limbs she inherited from that fine figure of a man, her father. Her prettiness would have been commonplace if fate had finished her as it began, by making one more fair-haired, fair-skinned girl like many others; but instead it had planted a pair of deep blue and black-lashed eyes in her face and thumbed black eyebrows over them. The effect was entrancing, as Sally was well aware. ('She knows she's pretty, mum, does that young madam.')

Sally knew that wherever she went every eye watched her coming and followed her going. The picture of her, laughing down at them, while the wind tried to run away with her red tam-o'-shanter was to stay vividly in Mark's mind. He looked at her in alarm. Since the brawl at home, he, much more than Patrick, had feared his brother's meetings with Sally. This was the first time he had been present at one. He was fiercely jealous.

'Hullo, Sally. You're late.'

Late! So it was no accident! What perfidy was this?

'Sorry, Pat. I couldn't get away. Hullo, Mark.'

'Hullo, Sally.'

'Look at Mark blushing. He's shy.'

'I'm *not*.'

'Leave him alone, Sally. He's a kid. He didn't know you were coming, anyway.'

'Aren't *you* ever shy, Pat?'

'*You* know I'm not. Coo, now you're blushing. Come on, Mark.'

Over the windy cliffs they went, but the day was spoilt for Mark. It was not chance, he knew, that these two drew together and away from him, murmuring things to each other. He hated Sally. He was glad when he saw a chance to snatch his brother back from her for a moment.

‘Pat, look, quick!’

Pat came eagerly over to stand with him by the roadside. Sally was left alone. Towards them, from Rottingdean, came something red on four wheels with the word Vanguard painted on its sides. Something that clanked and rattled and smelt, and was filled with shouting and singing people, ‘trippers’, who waved and called to them.

‘Coo, a motor-bus.’

They had never seen one before. Its name, had they known, was apt. The motor age, in which mankind would travel faster and have less sense of destination than ever before, sent its noisy, smoking herald to parade before them. It was not in the nature of boys to feel any misgiving. Mark and Patrick thought the Vanguard glorious. Sally, forgotten, came pouting towards them and tugged at Patrick’s arm.

‘Oh, come on, Pat. It’s only an old motor-bus.’

‘Only a motor-bus! Coo, I like that. Bet you’ve never been in one.’

‘No, and I don’t want to. Smelly things.’

‘I’d like to go in one. I’d like to drive one. Wouldn’t you, Mark?’

‘Not half.’

‘Oh, boys are silly. They can’t think about anything except engines and motor-cars.’

‘Girls only think about spooning.’

‘They *don’t*. You’re horrid, Pat. I’m going home if you talk like that.’

‘Go on, then.’

But Sally stayed. As the clean wind blew away the smell of petrol they went on to Rottingdean, in its cleft in the cliffs, and wandered up the village street to the green, the pond, and the old church. Patrick treated Sally with a lordly indifference which enslaved her. Against it she vainly tried the tricks of coquetry, which came as naturally to her at fourteen as to any practised

courtesan. She feigned interest in Mark, who was flattered and then humiliated when he saw the deceit. She looked boldly at other boys they met and turned round as these passed, so that they laughed coltishly and shouted after her. Patrick ignored it, and next moment she was at his side again. He was her master. Mark respectfully saw that Patrick bestowed a boon on Sally by letting her be with him.

They went into the church, which the brothers loved. Something in them responded to the majestic peace which tranquil old age, after centuries of storm and stress survived, imparted to the place; to the placidity which lay in the ancient stones, and to the serenity of the tempered sunlight, which transfixed painted knights and lay in heavy coloured shafts about the nave.

Mark suddenly found himself alone. The others had given him the slip. Searching, he found them, behind a column. They were kissing, these two children. Sally, on tiptoe, had her arms round Patrick's neck. Patrick's head was bent and his lips were pressed hard on hers. Mark never forgot the picture. They heard him and separated, Patrick without embarrassment, Sally with a defiant smile in Mark's direction. He felt that they ought to be shamefaced, for he had caught them, but they were not. He was puzzled and more jealous than ever.

Before they started for home they went down to the little cove. They leaned far over the sea wall, against which beat angry waves; and fulfilling Mark's and Patrick's conviction about the silliness of girls, Sally fell in!

Calamity broke on Mark. The word drowning had been but a green nightmare to him, something for a small boy to torment himself with in the dark just before he went to sleep. Now, the reality pounced on him. He had a shocking glimpse of Sally's legs and underclothing hurtling downward. He saw Sally's face, with surprise and terror on it, pop up and disappear again in the tumbling water. Patrick, who could swim a little, jumped in; Mark, who could swim less, jumped after him. With joy he felt his feet sink into shingle and remembered that the water, though rough, was shallow.

Anybody but a girl, he argued afterwards, would have got up and walked out. But Sally just let the waves bowl her over every time she stood up and was carried out, and gasped, and made

fearful faces, and opened her mouth to yell, so that it filled with sea water, and she choked, and then Patrick, half swimming and half wading, grabbed her sleeve, and Mark came up and grabbed the other, and they hauled her towards the rocks, Patrick thoughtfully catching her red tam-o'-shanter as it bobbed past. They tried to climb up with her and slipped in again, and climbed out again, and she was promptly sick. Suddenly the parapet of the sea wall above them was dotted with frightened-looking faces, from the mouths of which loud noises came, and a fisherman clambered down the rocks and helped them up, and there was much consternation and clucking and tut-tutting and, more scared by the commotion than by their sousing, they were taken into the fisherman's cottage to dry their clothes before his wife's kitchen fire, and given tea.

Undoubtedly Sally would have insisted on drowning if they had not pulled her out. Much would have been different in Mark's life if Sally had ended that day as a dummy with lolling head, rolling about on the pebbles beneath the tumbling water; and the time was to come when he would wish that this had happened, and would curse the slender threads which so relentlessly kept her life unravelled with his.

It was nearly dark when their clothes were dry, and these still steamed when they went out in search of the horse bus to Brighton. In the little square it stood, and the busman lit his lamps. Mark ran up the stairs to make sure of the front seats, by the driver.

He found himself alone. Looking round, he saw Patrick and Sally together on the back seat. They meant to start spooning again, on such a day as this! Jealous and disgusted, he turned his back on them and talked to the driver, while the lights came out at sea and the horses jogged quietly towards those ahead that came out on land. Once more he looked round. Now it was quite dark but he could see that Sally's head rested on Patrick's shoulder.

They reached Brighton and came by quiet side streets to the end of the twitten. Under a tree, away from the lamps, they said good-bye. Mark saw the light in Sally's eyes as she turned her face up to Patrick.

'Oh, Pat, you are brave. I might have been drowned.'

'Don't be silly, Sally. The water wasn't deep, and anyway Mark pulled you out, too.'

'I know. You're both brave.' But Mark knew that she cared nothing for his share in her rescue.

'You'd better run along in, Sally. What are you going to say? You'll get into an awful row!'

'I don't care. I'll say something or other. I'm not frightened. I'd stay out all night with you, Pat, if you wanted me to. Oh, Pat, I do love you.'

Tiptoe; her arms clasped tight round those indifferent shoulders, her lips pressed against that casual mouth. 'Good night, Pat. Good night, Mark.' A flash of legs, and she was gone.

They came to their home and saw a dark shape outlined against the yellow square of the window; their mother was waiting for them. They knew what she would say: 'I thought something had happened to you.' Why did she always assume the worst?

'Where *have* you been?'

'Sorry, mummy, we couldn't help it.'

'I've been so worried. Of course, you know what I thought.' Oh yes, they knew; how often had they heard it! 'I thought there had been an accident.' Then, as they came into the light, 'Oh! Oh! What on earth has happened to you?'

'We got wet.'

'Wet? How? Where?'

'We fell into some water.'

'What water?'

'The sea, mummy.'

'The sea! I knew it. Let me feel your clothes. I knew as much; wringing wet! I knew something had happened. You'll get pneumonia, both of you. As if I haven't worries enough. You might both have been drowned. How in the name of goodness did you fall into the sea?'

Though they twisted and turned, the story was dragged out of them bit by bit. And the biggest bit was Sally. Nelly Yeoman's thankfulness for their safety yielded to tears and reproaches about their spoiled clothes and the anxiety they caused her. They were sent to bed amid vows of vengeance on Miss Sally; 'I shall have to tell your father of this when he comes home.' Upstairs they lay and listened. Appledore arrived late, and by the tone of his

voice, as it rose through the ceiling, they knew from long experience that he had brought his bosom companion, a tipsy ill-humour, with him. They heard him come up the stairs and the door opened.

'What's this I hear?'

'We fell into the sea, father.'

'Never mind about the sea. You were with that slut again, Patrick, that's why you fell into the sea. I'm going to see her father now. I'll put a stop to this.'

He went downstairs and the front door slammed. They pictured him storming down the twitten to Sergeant Sud's house. They were sorry for Sally. Sergeant Sud, they knew, had a stick, and if he were not at home, Mrs. Sud was well able to use it.

'Pat, do you like Sally?'

'She's all right, she's a bit soppy.'

'Well, why do you kiss her, if she's soppy?'

'Oh, that's different. You'll find out all about that when you're older. She's hot.'

'What do you mean, hot?'

'Why, hot.'

'I wonder why father and mother don't like us being with her.'

'They think she's common. She doesn't talk properly.'

'I know. She says drowned.'

'She would have been drowned, too, if we hadn't pulled her out. She hadn't enough sense to get out herself.'

'Coo, aren't girls scatty?'

Downstairs the front door opened and closed. The Yeoman duet, of plaintive treble and irritable baritone, began again. Presently it ceased, and footsteps and shufflings and creakings told that their parents had gone to bed. A few houses away, Sally wept into her pillow, while in the room beneath Sergeant Sud and Mrs. Sud talked grimly of the drubbing they had given her.

'I'll drive that nonsense out of her head yet, the young madam,' said Mrs. Sud as she darned one of her husband's socks. 'The idea! At her age!'

'That's right, Ma,' said Sergeant Sud equably, with one eye on his evening newspaper and the other on his wife.

But Mrs. Sud was not right. She was wrong.

RESPECTED and popular in the twitten was Mr. Wily, of the red nose, tattered grey moustache, and book-and-pencil, who on Friday mornings went from door to door collecting pennies and twopences until his pockets were heavy with advance payments to the universal dun, death. For all these good people shared one supreme madness. Their common plaint was their lack of pence on earth; yet they spared a few of these each week to pay for their funerals. Life treated them with scant respect, but they could not bear to think that their skin and bones might be handled with indignity when they no longer inhabited these. Mrs. Slattern and Mr. Fretwork, living, were of small account, but they meant to depart this world in a carriage-and-pair, or even and-four. In this truly cold comfort they found some consolation.

Mr. Wily's eye was bleak as charity, but he was noisily jocular and the women looked forward to these backdoor interviews with the hereafter as welcome breaks in the dull routine of housework.

Nelly Yeoman fell an easy victim to Mr. Wily. She was unequal to the struggle with life but was determined, when she died, that the last affront of pauper burial should not be put on her (she knew her Appledore). Thus she added her weekly mite to the tribute which Mr. Wily collected on behalf of the pursuer of all men and of the insurance concerns; and her sons came to associate his calls with another of the phrases which their mother used to sadden their young lives. 'When I am gone!' was added to 'If I were to eat anything it would choke me!' 'Of course, I made sure you had had an accident!'; and their kind.

'When I am gone,' she would say, after Mr. Wily had departed and as she tucked her insurance book away in an untidy drawer, 'there will be enough to bury me. This is for you, Patrick. Your father knows nothing of it.' Then Mark and Patrick would look at her with dumb sympathy and she would assume a sorrowful mien and put her hand on her heart, so that they would be impelled to comfort and caress her. To some extent, poor Nelly Yeoman enjoyed her bad health.

Mark's mind's eye would always see the dark figure of Mr. Wily framed in their back door. when he thought of a day that

brought tragedy and comedy chasing each other in and out of their house like tumbling acrobats.

Patrick was sixteen when it all happened, and had been growing more and more discontented. His dark mutterings about 'clearing out of this' made Mark feel that they all lived on the verge of a crisis. At fourteen Appledore had led Patrick to a firm of solicitors in the Steine and the next day he began work there as an office boy. He brought home each week the sum of eight shillings. Mark, bereft, on his homeward way from school would go and peer through the gold-lettered window of Messrs. Affey and Davit into a dim interior where his brother copied letters in a big press.

Patrick grew taller, stronger and better looking. Mark was frailer. In Patrick a stock was revived that had become thin and weak in his parents. He was already bigger than many men and seemed in these years to jump from boyhood to manhood. He no longer hid his meetings with Sally, and Appledore had given up the attempt to interfere. Nelly Yeoman still tried to enlist the aid of Mrs. Sud, but without avail:

'It's no good, mum' (Mrs. Sud, during a hard-breathing pause in her scrubbing) 'I can't do anything with that young madam. She's getting too big for me to hit, and she just threatens to leave home if I say a word to her. *And* she'd do it, too, that one!'

'I'm sure I don't know what girls are coming to, Mrs. Sud.'

'No more don't I, mum. I had to do what I was told, when I was a girl, but nowadays they're different. They know too much. It's all this reading. When they're not running round the streets after boys, they've got their noses in some book. My father would have strapped me until I was black and blue if he'd seen me reading some of the things miss brings home. There wasn't no leaving home for us. It was home or the streets, and we knew which was best for us. But I believe that young madam would walk out as soon as look at you.'

Sally was now an apprentice at a big women's shop on the front. Mark would sometimes look through the door and see her fetching rolls of material for ladies in big picture hats and feather boas who sat at the counters, surrounded by fluttering senior assistants. From older girls there, Sally knew all about

London and big shops where the staff 'slept in', so that her threats to leave home were not idle.

She was lovely. Her queenship of the twitten, where all the boys tried to capture her, would have counted for little with her now that elegant young floorwalkers, and even elderly departmental managers, paid her attentions. But what she wanted was in the twitten; she still wanted Patrick.

He treated her with a casual condescension which enchained her. He could not be tamed or made jealous. He would go out with her, but usually she had to suggest it; and when they said good night she would wait with rising anger and fear for him to propose their next meeting, and then have to invite it herself. Worse still, she saw him with other girls, and he calmly admitted this when she taxed him with it. Then Sally would laugh and call him a flirt, and go indoors and cry, and Patrick would stroll away whistling.

But Patrick, though taking his fun where he found it, and having no difficulty to find it, was racked with dissatisfaction. He no longer talked merely of running away; he complained continually that he was 'sick of this life' and meant to 'get out of it'. He still left the twitten in the morning and came back at night, 'spooned' with Sally when she trapped him, indifferently took the tokens she paid him. But his spirit already dwelt in far lands; it flew with the winds and ran with the tides, rode distant prairies and roamed foreign cities. Only the flesh and blood of him were yet theirs. When Nelly Yeoman watched for him at her window, when Sally looked out for him over her garden gate, when Mark went to meet him, they all grasped at a shadow. He slipped through their fingers, in 1908, all these who loved him. . . .

The fatal day was one of many rat-a-tat-tats. The first came when they were all at breakfast. Nelly Yeoman's hand flew to her heart; news, to her, meant always bad news. Appledore came back with a telegram.

'The Old Boy's seriously ill,' he said, 'I've to go to Shepherdsmead at once.'

'Oh dear!'

'What's the matter with you *now*?'

'But, Pip dear, you *know* what day this is.'

They all knew what day this was, Friday! The day which began with a penniless household and ended with Appledore's return and the payment of Nelly Yeoman's housekeeping pittance. Friday morning was purgatory; Friday evening salvation.

'So that's it! My father's dying and you start whining about money.'

'We don't know that he's dying, Pip. And there isn't a penny in the house and nothing for lunch. It isn't *my* fault' (the tears began) 'you *know* we are always like this on Friday.'

'I suppose you mean it's my fault!' shouting. 'Why don't you manage better?' (Oh, blessed word, manage!) 'You'll have to get something in from the tradesmen and say we'll pay next week.'

'The tradesmen won't let us have anything more. We owe bills everywhere. I don't see how we can last out till Monday if you don't get paid to-day.'

'Oh, blast this bloody existence.'

'Pip, *please*, not forebe the renchild.'

'And STOP using that blasted backslang. Do you think they don't understand it? And STOP CRYING! All you can do is grizzle, grizzle, grizzle. You'll have to do *something*. I've only just enough for my ticket to Shepherdsmead. I'll wire to the office when I get there and tell them I can't come to-day and ask them to wire you some money.'

Now, Appledore is secretly enjoying all this, so odd is he. He has already banished money troubles from his mind (he will eat well at Shepherdsmead). His life is so drab, himself of such small account, that this is exciting and refreshing. He loves a fuss, particularly one which lends him a little self-importance, or the illusion of it. In his queer mind, a shadow play is in progress, in which he plays the chief part: 'Prodigal son hastens to stern father's bedside'; 'Vindictive parent reunited with forgiving boy'; 'Rich recluse asks pardon of disinherited child.'

Great commotion. Nelly Yeoman, red-eyed, presses Appledore's best pants on the kitchen table. Appledore brushes shoes on kitchen chair until they glisten. Much opening and slamming of drawers, much hair-combing and tie-patting before cracked mirror.

'Good-bye, Pip dear. *Please* don't forget about the money.'

'No, I won't. I'll wire the office. Good-bye.'

Appledore is gone. Before Nelly returns from seeing him off, Patrick mutters savagely to his brother, 'I'm sick of this, I'm going to clear out'. He leaves the room and the house. Nelly Yeoman waves to him from the window, smiles her anxious smile, turns towards her younger son.

'You needn't go to school to-day, Mark. You can stay and help me.'

Quiet is the house now. Mark feels his mother's unhappiness as she wanders helplessly about, dabbing shelves here and tables there with a cloth, so that rims and patches of dust remain; pushing an easy chair into a corner; panting in pantomimic evidence of exhaustion; returning to the kitchen and collapsing, defeated, into a chair.

They both jumped at the next knock. It came from the back door, and there, when they opened, was Mr. Wily, pencil in one hand, book in the other, mean eyes glittering through jovial mask.

'Good morning, madam. Good morning, young man.'

'Oh, good morning, Mr. Wily. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I must leave it for to-day. I've no change.'

'Very good, madam. I'll call again to-morrow.' A hint of menace, nevertheless, in snapping-to of little book, politely raised hat, retreating footsteps, closing garden gate.

At last came the loud, double rat-a-tat-tat they waited for. Mark ran for the telegram. His mother opened it and her face clouded.

'Tell him there's no answer, Mark. I wonder what your father means. We knew this.' She handed Mark the telegram:

'Father dangerously ill. Pip.'

In the early afternoon the next rat-a-tat-tat came. His mother tore open the telegram, threw it on the table, and wept. Mark picked it up:

'Father dying. Pip.'

Dusk was falling on the day of rat-a-tat-tats, and the house was dim, and Mrs. Yeoman, crying quietly, was making their fourth cup of tea when the third telegram arrived. Without hope she opened it and broke into hysterical laughter. It said:

'Father dead no flowers by request. Pip.'

The quiet house echoed with their laughter. *They!* They, who had not a penny and nothing to eat, were to send no flowers, by request. The gloom was gone. They laughed till they cried. The

tears, always so near Nelly Yeoman's eyes, now came from happiness. While the old man at Shepherdsmead lay stiff on his bed, these two people in the twitten almost made themselves ill with laughter. Suddenly they saw how funny was their lot, how comic their Appledore. They forgot their hunger in their mirth. After this, nothing could happen that was not funny. It was excruciating when the gas went out and they had no pennies. Funnier and funnier. They found some candles and went on laughing.

Then, all at once, Nelly looked at the clock and said, 'Patrick's very late. I hope nothing's happened to him.'

With that sorrow returned to them. As the evening hours passed she became more and more distraught, and at eleven o'clock, exclaiming 'Something *must* have happened', she put on her hat and they went out. In the twitten she looked about her helplessly. The night was very dark, the town almost asleep. She often said that she did not know 'which way to turn'; now this was true. She did not know how to set about her search.

Then she thought of the Jardine-Hakes. They were asleep when she knocked, but they came down, made tea, and listened sympathetically, if sceptically.

'But, dear, Patrick is such a big boy for his age. He's well able to look after himself. He's just stayed out late.'

'Yes, I'm sure that's all it is, Mrs. Yeoman.'

'No, no, I'm sure something must have happened. Perhaps an accident . . . I don't know what to do, I must find him. Mr. Jardine-Hake, would you *please* come with me to the police station? I would be so grateful.'

'Yes, of course, Mrs. Yeoman. It's bad luck for you, Appledore being away. I'll get dressed. . . .'

They were long gone. Rosa Jardine-Hake brought Mark cocoa and biscuits and opened her eyes as she watched him eat them. At two in the morning his mother returned, with white, strained face, and sank weeping into a chair.

Mark heard Gerald Jardine-Hake explain. They had been to the police station and Nelly Yeoman had persuaded them to send a constable with her to the house of Mr. Affey of Affey and Davit. The startled Mr. Affey told them that Patrick had not been to his work; they had assumed illness and had expected a message. There the trail ended. Patrick was gone.

Mark told them now of Patrick's threat to clear out.

'Oh, why didn't you *tell* me, Mark?'

'But why didn't you tell your mother, Mark dear?'

Mark was silent. If they did not know, he could not enlighten them. You did not 'tell' such things; you understood them too well.

Gerald Jardine-Hake promised to telegraph Appledore first thing next morning, and they went home. By the light of the last candle Mark went to bed and listened to his mother pacing about downstairs. He was alone for the first time. Patrick had always been in that other bed. He tried to picture Patrick sleeping under a hedgerow or haystack. He tried to believe that Patrick would yet come home, and felt his eyes hot with tears. He thought of Christmas Eves when they had both tried to stay awake all night to catch whoever filled their stocking with apples and oranges (perhaps even, if the gasman had been, a box of tin soldiers). Never could they catch that kindly visitor; yet on Christmas morning the stockings were always full. His thoughts switched to Grandfather Yeoman, and he felt scared in the darkness, as he tried to imagine that fierce old man lying dead. Then his mind returned to Patrick. He was full of misery. His family was broken up, the unhappy family that he loved.

His mother came softly in, and kissed him as he feigned sleep. He felt her tears on his face. . . .

When he awoke and came down she was still sitting by the window watching. She was haggard with fatigue. She had not eaten for twenty-four hours. Once more came a knock at the back door, and in its frame, when they opened, stood Mr. Wily, vulture-like against a grey morning.

'Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Wily, I can't pay you now. We've illness in the house and I've been up all night.'

'I'm afraid I must have *something*, madam, unless you want the policy to lapse. There's two-and-sixpence owing now.'

Thus Mr. Wily, bailiff for Lord Pennywise and the Honesty Assurance Company ('Honesty Gives the Best Policy') in their dealing with Mr. and Mrs. Pennyfool. Take care of the pennies was the motto of Lord Pennywise and Mr. Wily, and in later life Mark would remember this morning when he contemplated the palaces in London built with the pennies paid on policies which thus 'lapsed'. Now he pushed past his mother.

'Get out,' he said. 'My mother is ill and I'm not going to have you making her worse.'

Mr. Wily fell back a step from shock. 'Why, you saucy young rascal,' he said, 'how dare you . . .'

'Go AWAY!' shouted Mark.

All the financial might of the Honesty Assurance Company was in the threatening snap with which Mr. Wily closed his book. He retreated, his coat tails fluttering behind him as he went. 'Well, don't say I didn't warn you,' he called, turning at the gate, 'it's your fault. Two-and-sixpence owing . . .'

'YOU OLD SWINDLER!' shouted Mark.

'Shush, Mark dear, *please*,' pleaded his mother.

And at that moment the last of the rat-a-tat-tats sounded from the front door. It was Appledore's belated money order, and after Mark had run to the post office and the grocers, and they had eaten, they felt stronger.

Then Appledore himself appeared, hurrying down the twitten with black tie and wide crepe band on his sleeve. They saw him from the window. His face was red with self-pity and indignation.

'What the devil's all this about Patrick?' he shouted, as soon as he was inside, 'can't I even go away for a few hours when my own father dies, without some blasted trouble cropping up here? Where is he?'

'I don't know, Pip.'

'Don't *know*! What do you mean, *you don't know*?'

'He's run away, father,' said Mark.

The bluster went out of Appledore. His face paled and he became quiet.

'What is this, Nelly?' he asked; and she burst into new tears.

This man who squandered half his life raging about petty troubles which he might have mended, so that he made himself and his family miserable, suddenly became understanding and gentle now that he had led them into a trouble which was beyond mending.

Now, when it was too late, he tried to console them, and ran about from morning to night in search of Pat. Now he looked harassed and was contrite. But Patrick had vanished, and none of them was to see him again for many years.

NELLY YEOMAN became more pathetic and more resigned after Patrick went. She seldom went out and spent her time gazing at the world through the little peephole which her window was. The postman's knock never sounded, during these years, but that she laid down her knitting or her newspaper and waited, and each time she returned a little more wearily to her work or her reading.

Appledore had brought back from the great deathbed scene, with one of his queer impulses of sentiment, a piece of paper on which the Old Boy's failing hand had written, almost illegibly, the words 'I am going; I cannot see you now', and he hung this macabre relic, framed, next to the Old Boy's picture. The will, however, had left everything to his sisters at Shepherdsmead, and the occasional small cheque which they sent Appledore, largesse-like, embittered rather than pleased him.

He was becoming (he liked to remind them) 'thin on top'. He dunned his sisters for the price of a visit to the dentist and after this Nelly and Mark grew used to the sight of a glass of water by his bedside containing My Teeth. After travelling to London in the morning, reporting at the office, and setting out ostensibly in pursuit of orders, he would now return to Brighton, spend the day at the Sussex County Cricket ground, and go to London again by an afternoon train to report that, despite his efforts, no orders had been obtained. Apparently Messrs Nob, Snob and Nabob never guessed this.

No stranger would have suspected Appledore's poverty, when he sat on a bench on a fine summer's day, with the band of his old school round his hat, and cried 'Well hit, sir!' or 'Well held, sir!' In martial demeanour, he had risen from the ensign's rank, which his appearance suggested in 1900; Colonel Chukka (Indian Army) or Major Pukka (retired), the world would have said, contemplating him in 1910.

Thus they neither swam nor sank, the Yeomans, but were driftwood on the stream of English life. Since revolution, anarchy, or even the disintegration of the planet could not much have worsened their position, they should logically have been indifferent to all that went on in the world beyond the twitten. But far

from feeling such unconcern, they dreaded any change in the state of England's affairs.

When the Peacemaker died, Appledore's forefinger removed a tear and Nelly Yeoman and Rosa Jardine-Hake spent a happy week commiserating with Queen Alexandra. They knew the most intimate details of the Peacemaker's married life, and, though they felt their own domestic troubles to be deserving of pity, showed zest in agreeing that not all had been peaceful in the Peacemaker's own household. ('Such a lovely creature, my dear. All enamel, of course. They say she wears that pearl collar to hide . . .') 'Yes, yes, that's right, dear. Of course, his friends. . . !') However, they did not doubt that the Peacemaker must have made peace somewhere or divine that his death would be followed by the two most calamitous wars in the world's history.

Similarly, the Yeomans were furious when the Liberals attacked the House of Lords. They could not have been angrier if a breechless rabble were pounding at their own front door, demanding their heads on pikes. In this matter submissive Nelly Yeoman even took the lead at election-time, and no duchess of the old regime could have been more indignant.

Her chief excitement now was the arrival each week of *The Lady*, sent by a compassionate school friend. In its pages she found congenial company; turning them, she presented herself at Court, called on Worth to be fitted for her new gown, hobnobbed with Lady Hagridden of Broomstick and the Honourable Nausea Grim-Alkin, and generally enjoyed herself. Thus, Nelly Yeoman well knew where her loyalty belonged when the siege of the House of Lords began. If she must choose between the Lords and *The Lady* (on the one hand) and 'that Lloyd George' and 'that Winston Churchill' (on the other), she would not hesitate. Her only regret was that this brought her in alliance with those unwomanly creatures, the Suffragettes, who were clamouring in the streets for Winston Churchill's head. 'I'd have every one of them locked up, my dear; it's disgraceful!' (Though housewifery appalled her, Nelly stoutly held that 'a woman's place is in the home'.)

Never were the Yeomans so united, and Mark, at fifteen, enthusiastically shared his parents' views. Appledore pasted great placards with 'A vote for Plattfuss is a vote for England' (a Mr. Isaac Plattfuss was the Tory candidate) all over their

windows. He covered himself with paste in doing so ('Damn and blast the thing!' 'Oh, Pip, please come down; I'm so afraid you'll fall'), distributed handbills, and haunted the Conservative committee rooms.

Their allegiance in this matter left the Yeomans isolated in the twitten, which predominantly supported the Liberal candidate, Mr. Heinz Vogelscheu ('a vote for Vogelscheu is a vote for democracy'). If Mr. Plattfuss were elected, Britain and the House of Lords were safe; if Mr. Vogelscheu were returned, both would be destroyed. The issue seemed clear enough to Nelly Yeoman; and she could not guess that these mortal foes, after she was gone, would sit side by side in a different House of Lords, as the popular Labour Peers, Lord Chaucer and Lord Bunyan.

On election day a strangely belligerent Nelly Yeoman led, rather than accompanied, her husband to the booths, and all three Yeomans felt that they had struck a doughty blow for England, home and beauty. Indeed, they had, for Mr. Plattfuss was returned by one vote, undoubtedly Appledore's. Thus, the myriad Yeomans of England, insignificant though they are, yet ply a little needle and thread in the patchwork tapestry of their island.

While these great events resounded through the outer world, calamity occasionally came to the twitten; each time bringing gloom to some and transporting others into that state of pleasurable excitement at the misfortunes of their neighbours which is indistinguishable from human happiness. Even Patrick's disappearance, for instance, came to be forgotten in the general excitement about the things that happened, in 1910, in the households on either side of the Yeomans.

The Pews, who still protested by harmonium against Appledore's musical evenings, were renowned in the twitten for their religious fury and the close-lipped anger with which they went to chapel. Clearly, their faith caused them to loathe their neighbours as themselves and the first sign (unless the harmonium was the first sign) that Mr. Pew's wrath at his fellow-men's godlessness was getting the better of him appeared when he began to ask all he met in the streets 'Are you saved? You'd better hurry, you haven't much time'.

Emanuel Pew was a doleful looking man, with sunken cheeks,

piercing eyes beneath shaggy black eyebrows, and a nose reddened, no doubt by indignation, to a violent hue. He was a dentist, but not even that occupation, and still less his state of salvation, cheered him. His lugubrious mien and glittering gaze made solitary ladies jump. When they were asked in the street, by this fierce and gloomy stranger, whether they were saved, men usually edged away and women gave little shrieks and ran. They seemed to wish to be saved only from Mr. Pew. One day, however, a tipsy carman, questioned about his soul as he emerged from the Boy and Faceache, answered 'Mind your own bloody business' and hit Mr. Pew on the nose, making a bloody business of his face.

Now, religion was counted (to be on the safe side) to a man's credit in the twitten, and after discussion over the garden wall most people agreed that this was a poor reward for a man who only wished to mind other people's business for them, and that business in the next world, not even this. At the chapel, anyway, Brother Pew received warm sympathy, and when he rose from bed resumed his evangelist wanderings. He changed his method, however; he now lurked in dark corners, chose his victims, and, with his nose gleaming before him like a red light, jumped out on them with baneful glare and angry interrogation.

Nelly Yeoman was nervous of him ('I don't like the way he looks at me') but she did not think, on that account, to lock her backdoor when she went shopping. So it happened that, returning with Mark one twilit evening, she opened the door, groped her way towards the hall table and matches, bumped into something in the darkness and was harshly asked 'Are you saved? The time's coming, you know!'

Shrieking, 'Oh, he's mad, he's mad!' poor Nelly Yeoman fled, with Mark after her. Never again could she convince Mark that she was hardly able to move about; she sprinted like a professional that evening. Neighbours came running out, a commando of husbands was organized, and presently Mr. Pew, babbling, was led out and restored to his wife. Nelly Yeoman was accompanied home by Mrs. Jardine-Hake, who bathed her forehead with eau-de-Cologne and stayed until Appledore returned. He arrived on the ebb tide of alcoholic good spirits; that is, in the mood which he called (as though he himself knew it not) 'boozers' gloom'. He listened contemptuously to Nelly's tale,

said, 'I've got more important things to worry about', and went out.

The next day they heard shouts outside and, running to the window, saw Mr. Pew being hustled into a closed motor-car by two burly men. He disappeared, and then his head shot through the window as if fired from a gun, and he shouted 'Hi, help me! Help! Help me, boys! They're after me!' But none moved to save Mr. Pew, who had wished to save so many. The eyes behind the lace curtains, above the aspidistra leaves, watched, compassionately, excitedly, derisively. Then his head shot in again, as if he had been violently pulled from behind, and the car drove away, and that was the end of Mr. Pew and the duels between the Yeoman piano and the Pew harmonium, save that the twitten discussed for a time what life must be like in A Home, and Mrs. Pew and Emmy Pew soon moved to escape 'the disgrace' and Nelly Yeoman finally came to laugh so much when she told others about her adventure that she could hardly explain what had happened.

Scarcely were the Yeomans recovered from this hubbub on their right than tumult broke out on their left, where Mrs. Loveman lived. The twitten had ceased to notice Dr. Busy's calls; his motor-car now set no curtain-peepers agog, and even Nelly Yeoman had stopped appealing to heaven about the affair. The attachment had gained the dignity of age. Also, Nelly Yeoman loved chit-chat, and to refrain for ten years from talking to Mrs. Loveman over the garden wall would have been beyond her. Conclusively, perhaps, Mrs. Loveman was not by many moons as young, or by many pounds as lissom, as she had been; and nature now amply filled certain spaces fore and aft, in which the fashion of 1900 had formerly caused her to carry ballast.

One evening the three Yeomans sat at supper and were brought to their window by shrieks outside. Mrs. Loveman stood in her garden 'with her eyes popping out of her face and yelling her head off', as Appledore subsequently said. They ran out to her.

'What is it, Mrs. Loveman?' asked Appledore.

She stared through him as if she did not know or see him, moaned, and fell down. Another neighbour, a woman, came and knelt by her. And Appledore ran in.

On the sofa in Mrs. Loveman's neat living-room lay Dr. Busy, grotesquely contorted and with a great bubble at his mouth. Appledore, a nervous man save in domestic tyranny, stopped; Mark, peeping into the room from behind his father, for the first time saw death. Then the press of other neighbours arriving carried them in, and suddenly Mrs. Loveman's room, place of who knows what plans made and pledges exchanged, and hopes and sorrows shared, was full of excited people, saying 'What's happened?' 'How did it happen?' 'Give him air', 'We ought to undo his collar', 'He won't need any more air', and the like, and outside other people chattered around the reviving Mrs. Loveman, and then a policeman came, in a long coat, and they were all put out and stood in murmuring groups around their gates and watched the ambulance arrive and a bundle on a stretcher being carried out, and all that was left of Dr. Busy's and Mrs. Loveman's long pursuit of the shadow of happiness was Mrs. Loveman, whimpering on Nelly Yeoman's sofa.

There was an inquest, and something about 'unsound mind', and allusions overheard by Mark to 'a wife who wouldn't divorce him', and 'his practice was ruined by it', and Mrs. Loveman went away. Thus the Yeomans lost both their neighbours, but even when newcomers moved in still spoke of the houses on either side as The Pews' and Mrs. Loveman's.

Mark's childhood was ending. He left school, and would never know what he learned, save to read and write, in nine years at that hated place. Appledore, still seeing no further in front of his nose than eight shillings a week, took him to Mr. Hammer, the auctioneer in Western Road, for whom Mark began to stick on stamps and run errands. Like Patrick before him, he loathed the life.

Because of all these things that happened around him, and to him, he would never have forgotten 1910 even without the two great events which then followed to fix it in his memory. They heard from Patrick! He saw an aeroplane!

Alone, one Saturday, he went over the cliffs to Rottingdean. He heard a humming, turned, and could hardly believe what he saw. Pictures in newspapers were one thing. But to *see* an aeroplane, to witness with your own eyes man's conquest of the air, to be present at the birth of flight, was a thing scarcely to be

believed even when those eyes told you it was true. Mark was awake enough to realize that he lived in a unique moment of the world's history, and saw something which had never happened before and could never happen again. Mankind had not experienced anything like it since, far back in the forgotten wastes of time, the first fire was made, the first wheel was fashioned, the first boat floated. You had to be a boy to taste the exhilaration of being alive when the first aeroplane flew.

Unforgettable moment. Mark saw a thing like a kite and a smaller kite joined together. It flew a few hundred feet above the earth. He saw the pilot, sitting among wires and struts and stays, like a canary in a cage. The flying machine wobbled and shuddered, and the fabric of the wings fluttered. It toiled painfully on its uneasy way; it seemed to him lovely and fleet as a swallow.

Bursting with the news of this, he came home that evening, and at the door his mother joyfully met him with a letter from Patrick bearing an Australian stamp and the postmark Melbourne!

That was a happy evening. Patrick, casual as ever, gave no account of his journeyings and wanderings, said nothing of his flight, his hunger and thirst, his sufferings and struggles. He was well, he had a good job, he sent his mother a money order. How was Mark? He'd been made to feel unwelcome at first, because he was an Englishman, but he'd got over that. He hoped he would be able to come and see them one day. He would write again soon. And P.S. (bitter P.S. for Mrs. Yeoman) how was Sally?

Nelly Yeoman sang about the house for days after that. Apple-dore, too, improved for a time. They all wrote many letters to Patrick and listened with new zest for the postman's knock.

Sally, of whom Mark had seen little since Patrick's disappearance, when she had for a week or two haunted the twitten with woebegone expression, in the hope that he would return, now waylaid Mark as of old she had ambushed his brother.

'Mark,' she said, 'is it true you've had a letter from Pat?'

'Yes, he asked how you were.'

'I know. Mother told me. Will you do something for me?'

'What?'

'Will you give me his address so that I can write?'

'He'll send it to you himself if he wants you to write to him.'
'Oh, Mark, *please!*'

He gave it to her and looked after her as she went. Mark was fifteen now and Sally was lovely.

CHAPTER 7

AFTER Patrick's letter, Sally showed open interest in Mark. Normally his company was little valued by the girls he knew; he was as shy as Patrick was bold, and antagonized them by feigning, sometimes manly superiority, sometimes indifference. Sally's attentions thus flattered him, and he felt himself lucky to meet her so often, not guessing that these encounters were coolly planned by her: through Mark, she argued, she would receive news of Patrick.

One of Patrick's letters left Mark restless for weeks, for it said, 'Why don't you come out here, Mark? I'll get you a good job'. A ship and the sea; Patrick and Australia! But Nelly Yeoman cried and said, '*You* wouldn't leave me, Mark. You are all I have now'. And Sally, the minx, said, 'You won't go, will you, Mark?'

He could not leave these two women who loved him. He plodded on, through the drab corridor of his days, and stayed in Brighton. A new shadow now overcast his home; the shadow of 'that woman'. He only once saw her and she was ludicrously unlike the traditional destructress of another woman's home, being fat and over forty.

On a New Year's Eve this Mrs. Beddenbreck, who kept a boarding house near the twitten, for some reason never explained to Mark came to see them. Nelly Yeoman clearly never imagined, that evening, that this black pudding of a woman might play the siren, in respect even of Appledore. Mark saw a middle-aged body, whose plumpness was squeezed into a very tight black dress. Her bosom, which Mark, with memories of Rosie, studied with horrified conjecture, served as a display-shelf for locketts, brooches and beads. Mark was not capable of the obscenity of picturing the appetites of the flesh in relation to Mrs. Beddenbreck. His mother's dark hints, about his father and 'that woman', were long incomprehensible to him.

Mrs. Beddenbreck, who from battle with generations of visitors, had acquired the self-reliant and commanding manner of a sea captain on the bridge, talked complainingly about them and about 'my girls'. Thus far Nelly Yeoman, who disliked trippers and deplored the ways of servants (though she had none) fully sympathized. Such upcasting of eyes, indeed, was seldom seen.

'The things they *expect*, Mrs. Yeoman, you'd never believe. Tea in bed, and breakfast in bed and lie in bed all morning reading the paper, and their shoes must be cleaned, and then they complain if lunch isn't ready sharp at one. You'd think I was the Ritz, and me with my one pair of hands and them two girls.'

'It's disgraceful, Mrs. Beddenbreck.'

'And the *tricks* they get up to. Slip out the moment my back's turned and off they go without paying their bills, if I'm not careful, it's hardly creditable.'

'No, indeed, Mrs. Beddenbreck, it really is not *credible*' (with faint emphasis).

'And I have to watch they don't turn it into a common lodging house. They knocks on the door and it's "Have you a double room, please?" But I keeps my house respectable. "Excuse me," I says, "but I must ast you a question first," I says, "and no offence meant," I says. "Are you married?" I says, "because I 'ave to be careful," I says.' Mrs. Beddenbreck's grammar weakens as her moral fervour mounts.

Approving nods from Nelly Yeoman.

'And my girls! Mrs. Yeoman, it's hardly creditable the trouble I 'ave with them. Hoity-toity misses! It's "I can't carry coals to the top of the 'ouse, mum", and "I wasn't ast to do that at my last place, mum", and walk out as soon as look at them.'

This brought the conversation to the safe haven of 'I don't know what the girls are coming to'. Poor Nelly! To watch the indignant red rising in her cheeks, you would have thought she had a dozen lazy maidservants in the next room.

But then Mrs. Beddenbreck, who did not appreciate that she was on sufferance, presumed! From 'my girls' her discourse turned to Church Visitors, ladies of superior social status who sometimes called to inspect the state of her soul.

'Why, Mrs. Yeoman,' she rattled on, all unheeding, 'there was A Woman called the other day on the Lady Next Door. . . .'

Mark saw his mother tighten her lips. In her eyes, the worst name that a woman could be called was A Woman (save, unavoidably but regrettably, in the marriage service). She clung fiercely to her own Ladyhood. But if Mrs. Beddenbreck called Church Visitors *women*, and her sister-landladies, who were neither ladies nor owned land, *ladies*, what was Mrs. Yeoman? For years afterwards she and Rosa Jardine-Hake discussed this episode in terms of violent indignation: 'A *woman* called on the *lady* next door, my dear! What are we coming to?'

Then Appledore brought out 'the port' and once more Nelly and Mark, their stomachs curdling, watched a pleasant fellow transformed into a clown. After his third glass Appledore, smiling fatuously, began a buffoon's dance, pointing his toes, pirouetting, bowing to Mrs. Beddenbreck, who laughed until she nearly choked.

'How's this for the gay fantastic, eh, Mrs. Beddenbreck?'

'Oh, you are a one, Mr. Yeoman.'

'Light as a feather, eh?'

'Oh, you are awful. Isn't he awful, Mrs. Yeoman?'

'Just the southern blood in me coming out. Wilt tread a measure, fair maid?'

'Oh, Mr. Yeoman, don't' (little shrieks). 'Oh, you'll be the death of me' (little shrieks). 'Oh dear' (little shrieks). 'Oh, do stop him, Mrs. Yeoman.'

Appledore and the sausage in black silk gavotting and cavorting beneath the broken gas mantle. Nelly Yeoman smiling painfully, Mark grinning and sick with shame.

Save for Sally, Mark might have gone from this maddening household sooner than he went. But with Sally, on summer nights, he sat in a deck chair before the ramshackle pavilion of the Gaieties Concert Party, while Queenie Quaver, the soprano, sang (surely for them):

The hours I spend with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me.
I count them over, every one apart,
My rosaree. My rosaree.

Ah, that was romance, on warm evenings of 1912; or was it? Their hearts should have met on Queenie's top note, like lovers

at a trysting place. He longed for Sally to respond to the tender vibrations which the song awoke in him, for her hand to steal towards his own. But Sally seemed unconscious of Mark's emotion, and usually chose just such moments to indulge her habit, which he particularly resented, of 'looking at other people'.

This was the more infuriating because her attention immediately became fixed on the little stage when Len Blazer, the concert party's star, appeared, twiddling a cane and singing:

There are lots of girls besides
I should like to be beside
Beside the seaside
Beside the sea.

The words seemed harmless, but, to Mark's frantic irritation, Sally behaved like a nymph cornered by a satyr. Her giggling pantomime of shocked protest, which clearly implied that she would be unable to resist if the singer were beside her, made Mark want to hit Len Blazer on the nose. He hated her invariable remark 'Isn't he a devil?'

Similarly, their evenings at the bandstand on the West Pier were spoiled by her other remark, 'Isn't he good looking?' in respect of Mr. Lancelot Crimp. True, the fit of Mr. Crimp's self-designed and much-befrogged uniform might have made a Guards' ensign jealous; Mr. Crimp's wavy hair sat on a well-shaped head; Mr. Crimp waved his baton with grace; and Mr. Crimp's casual glance clearly excited the maiden ladies and flappers who came to worship him.

But Mark thought Mr. Crimp was 'a nancy'. He felt that women ought to admire in men the qualities he could offer, namely, a desire to protect them, a gentlemanly reserve in embracing them, so that physical differences received no embarrassing emphasis, and the like. Mark was the child of a century of cant and repression, the product of the cult of the gooseberry bush.

Sally made it plain that he was lucky in being preferred by her over many others. Chief among these was Mr. Piecegood, chief floorwalker at her shop. Sally's hints about him were maddening.

'Mr. Piecegood hasn't half got a nerve.'

'Which one is he? Is he the one with the big moustache?'

'Yes, that's him. He's ever so good looking.'

'I can't see it. He's got two gold teeth right in front.'

'Oo, I think they make him look smart. He had his own knocked out when he was thrown off a horse.'

'How do you know?'

'He told me.'

'That's what he says. I bet it was a two-legged horse that knocked them out. Why do you talk to him if he's such a cad?'

'Don't be silly, Mark, I can't be rude to him. He's my superior. Lots of the girls are after him. They think he's awfully good looking.'

'But you said he was a married man.'

'I know. Isn't it awful? He's a devil. He's always asking me to go out with him.'

'Why don't you complain about him?'

'Oo, I know how to look after myself. The girls all think he's going to be manager soon. He tried to kiss me.'

'What did you do?'

'I ticked him off. I told him to remember he was a married man. He's awful.'

'You didn't *let* him kiss you, did you, Sally?'

'Me? I suppose you want to insult me now!'

'No, I don't, I just wondered . . . You sound as if you didn't think he was so bad.'

Brought up on pictures of a dead man in silk and satin, laid low by another in satin and silk because 'he had spoken lightly of a woman's name', Mark was baffled by Sally's apparent admiration for devilry. He knew that, if he asked her, she would indignantly deny it. Yet he felt that she did not really detest Mr. Piecegood for being a devil and even liked his attempts. He felt aggrieved and perplexed.

His happiest hours with her were spent at a new and delightful place, the Bioscope in West Street. Sergeant Sud, recruiting days now done, eked out his pension by standing before this booth in a magnificent green uniform, and shouting to the citizens, 'Walk in, walk in, now showing'. The fine figure of a man had found a market in the new age of shadow-shows for his long limbs and broad chest. He became as much a landmark in Brighton as the public lavatory (a younger brother of the Albert Memorial,

tastefully decorated with mosaic portraits of the Royal Family) opposite which he stood. Among his perquisites were free tickets and with these, since Sergeant and Mrs. Sud, like Nelly and Appledore, no longer tried to thwart Sally, the two often presented themselves at the Bioscope.

In that darkness Mark felt that he made great steps on the road of love. Sitting at the back of the narrow hall, far behind the howling 'kids' in front, who booed the villain's triumphs and cheered his discomfitures, they shared the exhilaration of wild western gallops, the suspense of settlers besieged by Red Indians, and the sweet trysts of Mary Pickford. Mark learned the soft warmth of Sally's body, pressed against his. At last, he spooned. He did not know that spooning was a route, and not a destination, and in chivalry bound persisted when his enclamping arm grew tired, Sally's hair tickled his nose and the whole thing, its first piquancy passed, became hot and bothersome.

If they had had a little more time, these two might have meandered into marriage. Twelve years after its allotted span, the old century still lived on, in spite of motor-cars, aeroplanes, bioscopes. The gluey placidity which oozed about them was still that of the eighteen-hundreds; for a little while yet the great upheavals would remain behind the curtain of time. The respite might have been long enough for Mark and Sally to get married, from propinquity and aimlessness. But one Mr. Nagg took a hand and jumbled their affairs.

Mr. Nagg, who looked after Mr. Hammer's office in his employer's absence (whose business took him all over Sussex), was of almost incalculable unimportance; he was the last man you would have expected to shape the lives of others and, indeed, Mark alone in all the world was exposed to his spite. Mr. Nagg had worked his way up from boyhood to middle age and would soon achieve dotardry; he was still Mr. Hammer's clerk as he had been when Mr. Hammer first engaged him forty years before. In 1909 he had nearly resigned when Mr. Hammer took on a young woman stenographer who spurned Mr. Nagg's superior authority and 'answered back'. This nearly broke his heart, but consolation came when an office boy (Mark) was hired, whom he was incontestably 'over'. At last Mr. Nagg tasted power. He had someone 'under him' and his life's goal was reached.

He was bejewelled, bepaunched and bedewlapped; the tale of his years added up, in his outer man, to a truly repellent sum. Each morning he arrived, five minutes before nine, made paper cuffs out of old letters, and put on his 'office coat'. Pins Mr. Nagg loved and paper clips he adored. If he could salve some from an incoming letter he felt that he was the keenest of business men. Pieces of string were to him as gold to a miser. You never knew when they would 'come in useful', and he even had a drawerful of tiny fragments, tidily tucked away, marked 'pieces of string too small for use'. He demanded the same zeal from Mark, and often pried into the wastepaper basket to see if any such treasures had been wasted.

The letter-copying book gave him his best chance to torment Mark. If the sheets were too damp, the copy smudged; too dry, and the copy was illegible. Mark could never hit the happy mean.

'Just look at this letter. How can we send a thing out like this, all smudged! You'll have to do it again yourself, young man, after Miss Tapp has gone. It won't do you any harm to practise typewriting.'

'What's the good of this? I can't even *read* it. You'll have to copy these again, young man, and it's no good looking at the clock like that.'

Then the fateful day arrived when the Stamps were not right.

'What's all this, young man? The Stamps are wrong!'

'They were all right when I left them last night.'

'If they were all right last night, they'd be all right now. I've just checked them and they're two shillings short.'

'Then you must have made a mistake.'

'Don't you talk to me like that! I'm in charge here.'

'How can one clerk be in charge of one other clerk? You're only a clerk like me.'

'Don't you sauce me. I'll have to speak to Mr. Hammer about this.'

'Well, speak to him. But you'd better learn to add up first, you silly old goat.' Mark was liable to see red when he was goaded too far.

'What! All right, we'll see what Mr. Hammer says to this. It's a serious matter, stealing stamps.'

'I'll punch you on the nose if you accuse me of stealing stamps,

you liar. If anybody's stolen them, it's you, and I'm sick of this. You can stick your own stamps on parcels.'

Thus unexpectedly, while Miss Tapp giggled, did the chart of Mark's life alter; thus suddenly were twitten, home, Nelly Yeoman and Sally and all the associations of his boyhood thrust aside and left behind. Slamming the door behind him, he went out. Resting against the kerb outside was his bicycle, his first possession. Paid for with a shilling weekly, it was just his own. He rode away. The old century, the gluey placidity, fell away from him like a discarded skin. He anticipated by a little while the great convulsions in the world's affairs that soon would fetch millions like himself out of their little holes and ruts.

He had three shillings in his pocket. He barely thought where he was going; the bicycle steered itself towards the London Road. He had never been to London.

Now that, at last, he made his bid for freedom, he found it cold and comfortless. No exhilaration was in him. No sure next meal, no sure bed; these things seemed unimportant when you talked about them in the dark with Patrick, just before you slept, but now they loomed before him like footpads, brutal and menacing.

He rode all day, through villages that still dozed in the aftermath of Victorian tranquillity. In the late afternoon he entered the vast maze of unburied catacombs that was London. He had spent his three shillings on food. In a back street near the Elephant and Castle, where street traders shouted their wares, beneath blazing naphtha flares, he sold his bicycle for fifteen shillings, and came over Westminster Bridge in the thickening twilight, as the lights began to bejewel the dusk and enchant the grey river. He felt indescribably lonely.

Mighty London swallowed him, indifferently as an anteater a single ant. No eye lingered, of all the thousands that rested on him, save those of a coffee-stall keeper near Charing Cross who, from some impulse, pushed back the money he offered for a cup of tea with a rough 'That's all right, mate'. He sought and found famous streets: Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square; and gazed in awe at the men in evening clothes and women in fur cloaks who passed into the shining foyers of the Pavilion and the Empire. He waited about until the plays were over, so that he

might again see those knights and ladies when they came out and drove off to supper at Gatti's or Romano's.

Midnight found him in Trafalgar Square. He looked up at the dark figure of Nelson, lonely among the cold stars. There was no conceivable bond between this muddle-headed, friendless youth, lost in the immensity of London, and the stony shadow on the column; yet Mark Yeoman felt that he owed something beyond payment to this man, long dead, who seemed to live as Mark looked up at him.

He could not have explained his feelings. To do that he would have needed to recapture the thoughts and beliefs of long generations of English countryfolk, to take to pieces, stone by stone, the houses they built, and reclothe with flesh, reanimate with blood, the hands that made them; to disinter from the grave human loves and loyalties long stilled.

Mark's instincts and impulses were the sum of all these things, handed down from generation to generation, and now they made him feel that in Nelson he found a friend in London, one whom he understood and one who understood him.

The streets were gaunt and empty, and men with brooms swept away the refuse of the day as he recrossed the river to the cheaper side and sought a bed. He found one, in a slum, where a dim light over a doorway illumined the words 'Soldiers' and Sailors' Lodging House — Beds 6d.' The woman who kept it looked at him curiously.

'You'll be all right here, dearie,' she said reassuringly. Mark wondered, why should he not be all right there?

She showed him into a room with four iron beds, each with a thin coverlet over planks, and left him. One other bed was occupied. A man with a shorn head and stubbly chin lay in it, reading a newspaper.

'Ullo, mate,' he said, 'what's up? Run away from 'ome?'

'I'm looking for a job,' said Mark; but asked himself, 'How did he know?'

'Struth, you better kip down then,' said the man, 'if you can, on these beds.'

'Aren't they good?'

'Good? My oath! Like bloody iron! And I'm used to sleeping 'ard, too, where I come from.'

‘Where’s that?’

‘Where? You’re green, ain’t yer? There’s only one place they give you ‘aircuts like this. I come out this morning.’

For the first time in his life, save for the visit to Shepherdsmead, Mark Yeoman lay in a strange bed. The jailbird snored. Mark did not sleep: his mind was too full of thoughts and fears and questions, his body too cold and the bed too hard. This, then, was the grim reality of freedom and adventure! He wondered if Patrick had found it as chilly and frightening. He wondered what the morrow would bring, how he should find a job. He wondered what went on at home. His heart sank for his mother. He thought of that other evening when Patrick had not come home; but the dread of going back there was greater than his sorrow for her.

Thus Nelly Yeoman lost her second son.

CHAPTER 8

IN the next two years Mark Yeoman played many parts. He did not, like Patrick, sail away to begin again — or rather, to begin — in a distant land. The hour-to-hour struggle for meals and a bed kept him chained to London. His fight with London hardened him. He slept in the meanest lodgings, grew thinner than ever and had pneumonia, which took him for some weeks to a jail for the penurious sick called an infirmary. But even in his hungriest moments he rejoiced in his freedom, and when he wrote to his mother or Sally gave no address, for his feelings towards his home were those of an escaped prisoner towards a search party.

Gradually he forced London to yield him some sort of livelihood, and at the end of two years he was a much older Mark. He had been a waiter in a public house in Victoria; he had peddled notepaper and envelopes from door to door; he had been a trick cyclist of the streets, one of the many who seized the bundles of wet evening newspapers from the offices in Fleet Street and raced away, at risk of life and limb, to bring them to the waiting vendors in Oxford Street and the Edgware Road. He had done the things which a young man was forced to do, who

was not trained to any calling or fitted for heavy manual work, if he wished to survive in London.

London, seeing him willing, turned a kinder face towards him and allowed him to live. His first success came when, having overheard a fragment of conversation between two languid young men in the Charing Cross Road, he hurried to the stage door of Gailey's Theatre and was engaged for the male chorus of *Wedding Bells*. He wrote boastfully about this to Sally, knowing that she worshipped the theatre. At Gailey's, Mark learned a great deal very quickly. His knowledge of women, which was limited to one glimpse of Rosie, and slight physical contacts with Sally, rapidly increased. His young colleagues were all veterans of life, and, if he might believe what they said, he alone of them was not being kept by a lady, either of the chorus or 'in front'. Mark was one of twelve young men in evening dress who marched about backstage while Gertie Golightly, the leading lady, rode precariously on the high C's and winked lavishly at the stalls.

When *Wedding Bells* came off Mark (who had picked up a trick or two of step-dancing) was engaged to join a troupe, the Eight Loonies, which was being formed to tour the music halls. Producers at that time argued that, since the public liked the sight and sound of one man beating time to music with his feet, its enjoyment would be increased eightfold if eight men did this together. Thus the trains from Euston and King's Cross, as 1914 passed its meridian, were packed with groups of young men of Mark's type who called themselves the Eight Vagabonds, the Eight Rascals and the like and were sent forth to enliven the northern gloom of Widnes, Leigh and Bolton. Mark had mastered the double-treble-shuffle; the canes, the straw hats with purple bands, the purple ties and purple socks had all been chosen; the Eight had been measured for their light brown suits and new dancing shoes. . . .

But the twentieth century had other plans for its young men. One evening, Mark was carried along by roaring throngs towards Buckingham Palace. In years to come, when people complained that they had been dragged by deceitful leaders into a purposeless war, Mark, recalling that evening, saw that even wise statesmen, had there been any, could not have stopped the war at that moment. The mob would have swept away a man,

anywhere, who thwarted it. Shrieking and cheering like a man drunk or a woman hysterical, the mob everywhere clamoured for war. In Berlin as in London, in St. Petersburg as in Paris. . . .

Lost in the crowds, Mark gleefully heard the news. This would be better than step-dancing. This, he thought, meant liberation and adventure. Over the bared heads, between the hat-waving arms, he saw the King and Queen and the pink-faced Prince of Wales on the palace balcony. Thunder would have passed unheard in the roar that greeted them. The dance of death was to begin; on with the dance, shouted those about to die. And the next morning, the Eight Loonies forgotten, Mark Yeoman enlisted.

'Is your chest all right?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Never had any trouble?'

'No, sir.'

'Ever had pneumonia?'

'No, sir.'

'Right. Put your clothes on.'

Behind Mark, as he marched off behind a sergeant, the Victorian century died at last. Although the Widow's grandson was already four years on the Throne, this was the real beginning of the new century. Instead of brown suit and purple socks and tie, Mark put on khaki; instead of entraining at Euston he set out on the road which Englishmen, from father to son, would still be plodding, without knowing why or whither, when the new century reached its middle age. . . .

CHAPTER 9

MARK YEOMAN was happy for the first time. He lived among men and loved them, their songs, their jests, their bawdy talk. At last, he would cross deep water, see other lands. He only feared lest the war should be over by Christmas. On his first leave, he went to Brighton.

As he turned into the twitten he saw his mother waiting. Her neighbours, busy in their sunny gardens, recognized him, smiled,

called greetings. Mark suddenly realized, from their changed manner, that he was of some account there now.

'At last, my dear,' said his mother, kissing him, while the other women smiled in sympathy. 'How well you look! I don't know how you boys manage to look so smart in that dreadful colour.'

She was sweet and gentle as ever, and very happy as she made tea. The furnished rooms were even dingier than Mark remembered. 'Oh, I am so glad to have you back, Mark dear,' she said, 'you don't know what this means to me. Your room's all ready for you.'

'I'm looking forward to sleeping in a bed again.'

'You don't sleep in a bed!'

'No, I've been sleeping in tents, on the ground, or on the floor. Don't worry, mummy dear, I've got used to sleeping anywhere and everywhere in the last two years.'

'Oh, Mark, why did you do it? You were all I had left. It nearly killed me. I've worried and grieved about you, and waited and waited for letters.'

'I had to do it. I couldn't stand it here. I had to get out.'

'Your father nearly broke down. I've never seen him so haggard. He ran about night and day for weeks, trying to find out where you had gone.'

'He should have thought of that before. How is he?'

'Oh, very well, dear, I think. He's just the same. A certain lady cheers him up.'

Mark felt irritable, both with his father and with his mother. Why did they cling together, these two? How could his mother have expected him to stay in such a home. He knew that Mrs. Beddenbreck was the certain lady and the old feeling of shamed disgust rose in him.

'But never mind about that now, dear. There are worse troubles. I'm going to boil you some new laid eggs.'

Big, brown eggs in bubbling water; smell of toast and butter being lavishly spread; Nelly Yeoman smiling like a girl at Mark's appetite. This she loved. Mark loved it, too. Happier memories revived. Why, sometimes they had had jolly times together round this table, when Appledore was cheerful, and there was watercress for tea and they all joked. They lacked nothing, those days; why could not all their days have been like that?

'Look dear, just before you came I had this telegram from Pat. He's joined up, too.' She took a buff-coloured envelope from behind the cracked mirror, from which already protruded, in untidy array, three or four letters with Australian stamps. 'He says, "You may be seeing your soldier son sooner than you expected Missus Yeoman". What a funny boy he is. He always leaves you to guess most of what he means.'

'Mother, wouldn't it be topping if Pat came over here and had leave at the same time as me and we were both here together?'

'Oh, Mark, dear, perhaps my prayers are being answered. The room is ready for you both. I do hope Patrick will be able to sleep in that little bed. Mark dear, they wouldn't send you to France, would they?'

'Oh, everybody says the war will be over by Christmas.'

'But supposing it isn't. They can't send *you*. I read in the newspaper that boys of your age wouldn't be sent. Oh dear, this war. That awful Kaiser. And now Patrick, too.'

Well-remembered footsteps on garden path, familiar key in door. Appledore came in, covering slight inebriation behind jovial noise. He seemed to grow smaller, his brisk little legs looked thinner beneath his loose grey overcoat. His moustache waxed fiercer, and his Wellington-like nose loomed bigger above it as his cheeks lost their fullness. He now wore a very hard looking bowler hat, tilted to capsizal point, and liked shirts with a blue stripe and blue bow ties with white spots. With his passion for taking great pains in trivial things, he still spent twenty minutes each morning rolling his umbrella until it was sleek and smooth. He was just as particular about the polish of his shoes, and so much disliked his shapely fingers to be stained that he wore on his forefinger, when smoking, a ring from which rose a little rod ending in a smaller ring, that held his cigarette. Odder still, in incoherent protest against the untidiness of his home, he now had rabid bouts of window-cleaning, and the wondering neighbours would see him, in old flannel trousers held up by the tattered remnants of his old school tie, rubbing away at the panes as if he were rubbing the very Kaiser's nose in the dust. With such spasmodic pinpricks of order, he sought to combat the disorder of his life.

'Well, well, here we are,' shouted Appledore, 'the prodigal

son returned. Is the fatted kipper ready?' They tried to produce the kind of mirth which would keep him good humoured. 'Well, how are you, old chap? Are they looking after you well in the army?'

'Pretty fair, thanks, father.'

'It's a bit of a blow for your mother and me, of course. We'd hoped you might help restore the family fortunes. You won't be able to on a bob a day. Oh well, everybody's doing it. All the youngsters at the office are leaving to enlist.' (At least, Appledore never said, 'I only wish I were younger'.)

'Pip, look, this telegram came from Pat. He's joined up, too, and may be coming back.'

'What! Well! We shall have to fatten another kipper for the slaughter.'

'Pip, dear, *don't* keep on about kippers.'

'Father, let's all go to the Hippodrome.'

'I've no money for the Hippodrome.'

'I didn't ask you to spend any. I want to take you both.'

'Oh, of course, if you've got money to throw about like that. I should have thought you could have made better use of it by giving it to your mother. We need it here, God knows. But I can't come. I have to go out to-night.'

Mark sees the flush mount in Nelly's cheeks. The certain lady spoils his homecoming. He begins to wish he had not come, to fidget to be gone again. There is a knock, which Appledore answers, and his voice is heard, jovially shouting 'Whom have we here?' Nelly Yeoman looks at Mark and asks apprehensively, 'Who *can* it be?' Re-enter Appledore with Sally.

'Here's Sally come to see Mark.'

In two years' absence, Mark had conducted experiments in the science, or art, called love. These were, to the reality, what the scribbings of an infant with its first pencil are to a sketch by Leonardo; but Mark thought of them as handsome conquests, these kisses behind the scene of Gailey's and embraces beneath the trees in Hyde Park, and he was now much less diffident with women than formerly. Indeed, he felt rather guilty for having 'let down' so many confiding creatures who had given him their hearts and a share of the pity he owed them all went to Sally, the first of them. And here was Sally! He looked at her. Sally, shy,

rather breathless, a little shamefaced, was appetizingly rounded in some places and delightfully slim in others, was lovely. And those dark eyes beneath that fair hair. . . .

'Oh, please iggscuse me, Mrs. Yeoman. My mum told me she saw Mark in his uniform and I thought perhaps he was going to France and I did want to say good-bye and good luck and I don't know what you will think of me and I brought this' (a small silver cigarette case).

'What a sweet thought, Sally.' But Nelly Yeoman's eyes remained cold. You calculating little hussy, they said. Mark thought her incorrigibly unjust about Sally.

'You're in luck, Mark. Never had a silver case myself. A paper packet of yellow perils always had to be good enough for me, ha-ha.'

'Thanks, Sally. It's tophole.'

'They wouldn't send Mark to France in any case, Sally. He's too young.'

'My dad says it'll be over by Christmas anyway, Mrs. Yeoman.'

Mark was young, he was a soldier, he knew that nothing could stop him going to France, he was already saddened by his home. He wanted to be with Sally.

'I think I'll see Sally home and go out for a bit, mother.'

'Very well, dear. Don't be late. I haven't seen you for so long.' Nelly Yeoman reproduced in facial pantomime the sufferings of all the martyrs.

So Mark took Sally to the Hippodrome, and Sally said that Marie Lloyd was disgusting. Mark did not think so, but was pleased, nevertheless. If his memory reminded him that Sally had formerly gone far out of her way to find, with much glee, a satanic lewdness in the harmless ballads of Len Blazer, he now rebuked his earlier self for misjudging this virtuous girl.

His great emotional moment came when that human marsh-mallow, Lollie Pop, large and golden-haired, lowcut and pink, stretched out massive arms and sang that she didn't want to lose them but she thought they ought to go because their king and their country both needed them so and she would want them and miss them but with all her might and main she would hug them squeeze them (no mean threat, this) kiss them when they came back again. Lollie's rolling bosom was of daunting proportions,

but Mark was in an exalted mood which disdained the obvious risk of suffocation and made him feel that to be clasped to one such would be a fair reward, when he came back again; and in his throat rose a blissful lump of self pity at the thought of the death on the battlefield which would prevent him coming back again and a bereaved Sally from thus welcoming him. Sally's hand stole into his and pressed it. This was worth dying for. He received a small payment on account of glory.

Afterwards they went through the dark lanes.

'How could you go away without even saying good-bye to me, Mark?'

'I didn't say good-bye to anybody, Sally. I couldn't. I just went.'

'But I'm not anybody. And you could have written.'

'Well, I did, didn't I?'

'What, that measly little letter and one postcard in two years? I thought you loved me.'

'Well, I had some bad times. I was in hospital, too, with pneumonia.'

'Oo, that's serious, isn't it?'

'You're better off without it.'

'Oo, Mark, I was excited when you told me about going on the stage. I couldn't hardly believe it. I didn't think you'd got it in you. You *have* altered, you know. You seem so grown up.'

'There wasn't anything very exciting about being a chorus boy. I was on the stage but not of it.'

'What do you mean, Mark, on the stage but not of it. I wish you wouldn't talk like that.'

'Like what?'

'Well . . . above me.'

'Oh, shut up, Sally.'

'Don't say shut up to me. I can't help it if I'm not educated like you.'

'Why do you talk such rot, sometimes, Sally? You *are* educated like me; you went to exactly the same kind of school. What I mean is that I wasn't really *on* the stage. I wasn't an actor. I just cakewalked about at the back.'

'I bet you got to know lots of girls.'

'Oh well, there were the girls in the show, of course.'

'Did you go in their dressing-rooms?'

'No, it wasn't allowed. Not that they seemed to care. They used to leave their doors wide open when they were changing.'

'Mark! I think you're disgusting.'

'They were, perhaps. I don't see what it had to do with me.'

'I think you're awful.'

But he felt that, if she thought him awful, it was as she thought Mr. Piecegood 'a devil', that is, with secret admiration. 'I'm glad you're not there now, with those awful girls.'

'Well, I would have been really on the stage by now, but for the war. I was going on tour with a dancing troupe, eight of us, all men.'

'Oh, Mark, that would have been lovely.'

'I thought you said the stage was disgusting.'

'Oh, but that's different. Perhaps you'd have become a star. Mark, why did you join up? You're so young. There's plenty of others without you.'

'I'm not a shirker.'

'You don't love me then, like you used to say!' Unreasonable creature: was he not going to fight to save her and all her sisters from something or other? 'Must you go back to-morrow, Mark?'

'Yes, I've only got twenty-four hours, Sally.'

'Well, I'm glad I came to your house, then. I don't suppose you'd have bothered about me. . . .'

'Yes, I would, Sally. I was coming to find you.'

'You only say that. . . .'

'No, I was, I swear it. I wanted to see you.'

'Anyway, I'm glad I came. You do know now what I think of you, don't you, Mark? I had to force myself to it. I was frightened of your mother. But I wouldn't let anybody stop me, not from seeing you.'

Their positions had changed, Mark reflected. He was now the masterful one, and she more submissive; he accepted this as his due, knowing that he had developed in two years. They came to the twitten, but walked past it, up the hill to the old churchyard, where the trees made friendly pools of shadow in the lamplit streets, where they could lean against the low wall and look down over the rooftops to the quiet and shining sea. The September night was warm; they pressed together. Sally was not selfsure

now, or indifferent; did not fidget to be off or glance listlessly around her. She kept her face upturned to his.

'They won't send *you* to France, will they? Oh, Mark, don't you go, now that we've come together again.'

How foolish he had formerly been to think this lovely girl beyond his reach. Here she was, pleading with him not to leave her. Poor little thing. He was even a little bored. How pitiful for her that he must go. But then she humbled him.

'Have you heard from Pat, Mark?'

'Yes, we had a telegram to-day. He's joined up and he's coming over here.'

'Oo, how lovely!'

'Oh, you're glad *he's* joined up, then?'

'Well, it would be nice to see Pat again.'

'Perhaps you'd sooner see him than me?'

'Don't be silly, Mark. I expect Pat's engaged now, if he isn't married. I can't believe that he's coming back. Just fancy if he comes to Brighton.'

Mark grew very jealous and she had to explain what she had really meant at great length before he was convinced, once more, that he had misjudged her. Under the moon, by the old churchyard wall, she clung to him in a way he had never known before with any girl. How could he doubt?

'Oh, Mark, hold me tight, tight . . . hurt me. Why must you go now? It would be so lovely if we could always stay together now. Then everything would be all right. Did you really want to see me, Mark? Why did you want to see me?'

Mark was older and knew a good deal more than at their last meeting. He took Sally to him in a way that told her, without any words, that he had really wanted to see her again, and why. She winced from the pressure of his mouth and gasped from that of his arms. But she liked it and strained to him, asking for more. . . .

If the place had been lonelier, more friendly to lovers, the clamour of their bodies would no longer have been thwarted but would have merged into its natural harmony. Then both their lives might have been different. If Mark could have taken Sally then he might never have regretted it. She was at the zenith of her beauty. Soon the magic moment of her blooming,

as brief as a butterfly's flight across a garden, would be over; but on this September night in 1914 it seemed impossible that her loveliness could ever wane.

This or that might have been, but was not to be. Mark had to go and he did not see Brighton or Sally or his home for two years. He took away with him the picture of Sally waiting lovingly for his return.

CHAPTER 10

At last, Mark's boyhood dream of crossing deep water came true; the vision he had so often seen from the cliffs was realized. One night, he stood in a ship, that was washed white in the dark night by the beam of a searchlight, and looked about him at the ennobled, knightly faces of his comrades. He learned the exhilarating joy of disembarkation at a foreign city in the dawn. He set off on a long trail, beating time with his feet now, not on theatre boards, but on cobbled roads, with a rifle on his shoulder and all his wardrobe on his back.

He was one of many millions, Mark Yeoman, drab young men who moved towards each other to mingle in the dance for which they had wildly called the tune in Manchester and Melbourne, in Hamburg and Vienna, in Moscow and Marseilles. From east and west they came, rejoicing, to meet on the muddy altar of their generation, the Western Front; Belgians, Frenchmen, Russians and Germans; Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen and Irishmen; Canadians, Australians, South Africans and New Zealanders, and many more.

Death knocked ceaselessly as they marched towards each other. At first they heard the knocking afar off and said jestingly, 'Hear that? That was a gun!' Then, as they moved forward, the knocking became louder, more menacing. When they reached their deadly rendezvous, it was a deafening and inexorable message, addressed to each of them personally, as if some infernal postman chased them with a dunning letter.

They were the last babes of the old century. Now they entered on their inheritance. Gaily, light of foot and blithe of spirit, whistling and singing, they marched at first, through

a smiling countryside. More soberly, where the fields were trodden and ridden brown by the swarming armies, they plodded on. Sagging beneath their loads, they stumbled in darkness towards the final trysting place; the muddy, bloody ditch called the Front Line. There, they were to defend the civilization which their progenitors had built up in nineteen hundred years. There, they knew, if they crouched low enough, and outstayed in crouching-power other young men who crouched in another burrow a hundred yards away, they would one day win the war.

In this farce (as he subsequently came to consider it) Mark Yeoman began to play his insignificant part. By Christmas of 1914, which he spent in the trenches at Armentières clad in a shaggy goatskin coat, he was a nineteen-year-old veteran of the front line.

CHAPTER II

In January of 1916 Mark Yeoman stood on the firestep of a trench before Ypres and peered towards the German line.

It was the hour of stand-to, that moment, before daybreak and before nightfall, when the millions of young men over whose cradles, in the 'nineties, mothers all over the world had happy, hopeful dreams, rose and faced, though they did not see, each other. A solemn instant, thought Mark, this quiet and invisible uprising of the youths who stood shoulder to shoulder, face to face, between the Channel and the Alps. It was as if they saluted themselves, their pitiful generation, the madness which was to destroy them.

From all ends of the earth they had come, ardently, and now, as the night spread or folded its wings above them, they were left alone with their bewilderment, their loneliness, and the frigid bedmate, death. They were like gaping dolts who had yielded to the showman's cries and pressed into his booth to behold wonders; and inside were but empty darkness and mocking laughter. They felt like men who had thought to possess a virgin and, with daylight, found themselves in the arms of an elderly, grinning harlot.

Whether they faced east or west, they knew that a few yards away, hidden, stood others as forlorn as themselves. Morning or evening, they knew that in their own countries politicians and newspapers would be explaining how good were their spirits, what fun they were having, how quiet was the Western Front, how unheroic they thought themselves, how resolute they were to make a better, freer, safer, more peaceful world. They knew that this was humbug and that they were the dupes.

By Corporal Yeoman's side on the firestep, with a little blue mark between the eyes, like the smudge of an indelible pencil, lay one of these twenty-year-old infants, brought into the world with such travail and hope, and now tipped out of it like refuse on a heap. Harry Credule, of Liverpool, trusting to a thick dawn mist, had looked over the parapet, and since then, all day, had lain and groaned. Mark had not known that a man with a bullet through his head could live so long. They had not been able to get him away during the day. Now, as the dusk deepened, he died, and stretcher-bearers came to fetch him. As they lifted the stretcher, one of them missed his hold and Harry fell into slush and snow. The bearer gulped, for he was new to the job, and his hands shook so that he could hardly pick Harry up.

'Go on, get him up,' said Mark roughly, 'you can't hurt him now. It's the live ones you don't want to drop.'

So much he owed to his corporal's stripes, but his inner man trembled as much as the bearer's hands. He had spent fifteen months in the trenches, he was one of the few survivors of his original company and he had not seen a German. Like his own shadow, the fear of death walked with him. When he saw the next man destroyed, he told himself, 'We have so short a time to live, a little less makes no odds. This mess of flesh and bone, which was a man, is just a husk, done with and thrown away'.

But his youthful spirit spurned logic; it wanted to live. He had wandered long on the lonely verge of annihilation and had seen many die. He loved those others. Whether they showed their fear or mastered it, they all felt it, as he felt it, and they were all heroic to him. He despised the drivel about their matter-of-fact unheroism, their cheerful acceptance of the Job they had to do. That was politicians' talk, newspaper talk. They did not believe in that Job. As they passed over the brink of annihilation their

eyes, whether calm or fearful, revealed bitter enlightenment; it had not been Fun, this was not Glory, they had saved no principle and served no ideal. They had just been killed, and in the moment of disintegration they saw through the hoax.

Death, though it seized his friends, repeatedly missed Mark, and each time he survived he was fonder of life. Now, watching for the dark shapes of German patrols in the snow, he thought of women. At his age, in peaceable times, he would probably have solved those mysteries of a man's relations with women which, if he might believe his companions, were mysteries still to him alone. He greatly feared to die a virgin and regretted past forbearance, particularly with Sally. Standing on the firestep, he realized that other girls, too, had been more disappointed than pleased with him, in this matter. Now the promptings of his body grew impatient. He dreamed luridly of his reunion with Sally, when he would claim fulfilment of her promise to welcome him with all her might and main. But when he came out of the trenches, he looked at Georgette of the Coq Rouge in Poperinghe with eyes so hungry that this much beleaguered girl withdrew from her shouting khaki customers, invited Mark with a glance to follow her into the passage, and there calmly asked him 'Why do you look at me so? You are *gentil*. What do you want of me?' She knew the answer; but then her mother, the landlady of the Coq Rouge, came down the stairs and Mark had to retire, wishing only that he deserved the bawdy compliments of his friends.

He thought of Georgette now and experienced the worst of the young soldier's torments, who has long been on active service; the longing for a woman's warmth. Behind him he heard, growing louder, the mutter of a message passing down the line of men.

'The captain wants Corporal Yeoman.'

He stepped down, pushed his way along the trench, squeezed through the curtained entrance to the dugout and saluted.

'Corporal Yeoman, they are asking for the names of men suitable to take commissions and I'm thinking of sending in yours. Do you want me to?'

Standing in the mud-walled cavern, where a candle flickered in a bottle and the captain's mug of tea steamed on an upended ammunition box, Mark thought how pleased his mother would

be. He himself was filled with glee at the thought that he might catch up with his admirable brother. For Patrick, Nelly Yeoman wrote, was now in England and had been to Brighton. Patrick was an officer and looked splendid in his uniform. Patrick was going to transfer to the Royal Flying Corps.

'Yes, please, sir. Thank you, sir.'

Mark went back through the trench jubilant and terrified; terrified because he now feared to be killed before he was commissioned. The weeks that followed were particularly hard to bear on this account. But his luck held, and he was still alive and unwounded two months later when his papers came through.

Thus the spring of 1916 found Cadet Mark Yeoman at a quiet old château far from the knocking of the infernal postman. He looked into a future hung with glittering delights, like a Christmas tree: leave, the uniform, England, Sally, and, best of all, a respite, the certainty of life for some months. Ah, to see those white cliffs again, to go home an officer, to have money, to hold a girl in your arms. So he dreamed, one evening in the park of the château, when duty was done.

'Yeoman!'

A head was thrust from a window. 'Double up, there's a telephone call for you.'

Wondering — for he had no friends in France — he ran into the adjutant's office.

'Hello.'

'Hello, digger. Is that you?'

'Pat!'

'That's right. I've been searching all France for you. How are you, boy?'

'I'm fine. Where are you, Pat?'

'Right here in St. Omer and you're coming out to dinner with me. Meet you at the Hotel Bristol and make it soon, young feller. I want to see you.'

Thus unexpectedly the brothers met again, in the crowded dining-room where fine old crusted brigadiers, who still dreamed of Spion Kop, and highly polished young staff captains, glared angrily at a corporal muddy from the trenches, in the company of an Australian captain (but said nothing because Australian officers were known to be quick-tempered and uncouth).

Mark was overwhelmed by his brother at first. An hour passed before he was able to feel at ease with this tall, big-chested and supremely self-confident young man with the strong Australian accent. Travel and adventure had broadened the gap between himself and Pat. Mark, who was still trying to accustom his imagination to a vision of himself in officer's uniform, saw that Pat was unabashed even by generals. He ordered champagne as if he had been born to wealth and drank it as if he had been suckled on it. He told Mark that he had just spent a short leave in Paris and had 'got himself a grisette' there. From the way he spoke of women he clearly assumed that Mark knew as much about them as himself. He referred casually to his adventures after leaving home, and seemed to think them too ordinary to be worth description. He had found a ship at London docks; pretty tough, that life was, but you got used to it. He'd deserted at Capetown, had a good time, and earned enough money to pay his passage on to Australia. Fine country, Australia, fine girls, too. He was a journalist on a Sydney newspaper and he didn't mind how soon he went back to that. Yes, he'd been to Brighton. Father seemed just the same, the old waster.

Pat had shown the signs of exceptional self-confidence even in the twitten. His travels had developed this into a masterful assurance. Mark felt all his boyhood admiration of Pat return as he studied his brother. He wondered why Pat, alone of the four of them, had dark hair and brown eyes. He coveted the great slouched hat hanging on a peg behind Pat's head. Pat was signalling to a waiter over the heads of three staff colonels; they might not have been there for all the notice he took of them. Then he turned and faced Mark again.

'I tell you who I saw, young Mark,' he said, 'do you remember that kid Sally?'

'Yes, of course I do.'

'Oh, I thought perhaps you hadn't seen her since I went away. I used to run around with her a bit. She was a good-looker then. But man, you ought to see her now. Brother, she's some peach.'

'Did you take her out?'

'Sure I took her out. She likes me, does young Sally. I'd almost forgotten her, I've had so many skirts since those days. I scarcely recognized the kid, she's come on so. Well she saved

me the trouble of looking round for somebody to take out. Mark, do you remember when I had a scrap with father about her?"

'Yes, I remember. Did she say anything about me?'

'About you? No. Why, have you been raiding that farmyard, too?'

'Well, we went about together a bit.'

'You did? Good for you. Sally's the girl to cheer the boys up when they come home. But don't let yourself get serious with her, young feller. Take advice from your big brother, don't get running your head into anything. You know, Sally's one of those girls who only appreciate a man if he takes everything she likes to give him and gives her nothing in exchange. I wouldn't like to see you get caught, Mark. You're still a tenderfoot. Anyway, don't let Sally fool you. She's nice, but she's not for keeps. When did you see her last?'

'1914, before I came out here.'

'H'm, that's a long while. I hope this show won't go on for another two years. I want to see Sydney beaches again. When are you going to get leave, Mark?'

'In May, when I get my commission.'

'Good boy, I'll be in England when you get there. My papers have gone through for a transfer to the R.F.C. and I'll be going back to take my wings any day now. Then it's up in the air for me. That's what I want.'

Pat's ambitions, thought Mark admiringly, knew no bounds. First the sea, now the air! It was just like Pat to talk of flight as something commonplace, and to venture into the air as lightly as he had run away to Australia. To Mark, the whole idea of flying was something incredible; although he was now accustomed to the sight of aeroplanes, he would never be able to bring himself to believe that they existed until he flew. Mark watched and listened, while Pat ate and drank and laughed, with the devoted admiration of a younger brother; and with bitter jealousy.

What was this about Sally? Mark was still a confiding young man and believed that Sally, at home, waited longingly for his homecoming. He could not believe that she would be false to that passionate moment under the moon. He was in that inexplicable stage of the young male's development when he could

not imagine that a woman would break even an implicit vow, though he knew perfectly well that he himself would have taken Georgette with lust and gusto if they had not been interrupted. He still did not believe that Sally had gone as far as Pat's words suggested. Because he was still a novice himself, he found it almost impossible to picture others engaging in the act of physical union. He imagined nothing more than a stroll along the front and a few kisses. But even that made him angry and he thought of some nasty things to say to Sally when he saw her.

They had not much time together, for Pat had to go on to Calais. He went hilariously off in a staff motor-car driven by an Australian private, which was waiting for him in the Grand' Place, shouting as he went, 'So long, digger. See you in England soon'. Mark, who gathered by this time that the entire resources of the Australian Army were at his brother's disposal, walked back along the dark canal to his château five miles away. He was with wine for the first time in his life and in a confused way kept thinking about Sally and wondering what it was that he must say to her when he saw her. . . .

And one day in May, self-conscious because of the officer's stars on his shoulders, he saw the white cliffs again, growing larger and clearer as he watched them. When he reached Brighton, Patrick was already there. A world war reunited this little family, which in peacetime was so much divided against itself, and for seven days the Yeomans were together again. Appledore put on his own uniform (he was in the British Volunteers) and saluted his sons.

'Private Yeoman of the Gorgeous Wrecks reporting for duty, Captain Yeoman, sir, and Second Lieutenant Yeoman, sir!' Why was he such a clown?

Mark's eagerness to find Sally, to reprimand her for her dalliance with Patrick, and to insist on being welcomed by her with all her might and main, was thwarted, because when he got home Sally was away, and was not expected back for several days. On his first evening at home he found that his mother, from an excess of maternal pride, had promised his aunts that he and Patrick would go to Shepherdsmead. The return of her sons awakened in Nelly hopes which had formerly rested on rich old Grandfather Yeoman, and which she now transferred to the three

Aff Aunts. Her sons were shocked to find that she still cherished these old ambitions.

'Your Aunts are so excited and so proud of you both. They want you to go to luncheon on Saturday.'

'I'll see the old bitches further first.'

'Patrick!'

'But Pat's right, mother. They never wanted anything to do with us before. They've never even seen Pat. Now that we've both got pips up they suddenly want us over there.'

'I'll be shot if I'll waste my precious leave going to Shepherdsmead. I want to enjoy myself while I'm alive.'

'Pat,' and their mother's mouth trembled, 'how can you talk to your mother like that.'

Her tears, and their pity for her, softened them. Patrick, with bright new wings on his double-breasted tunic, and Mark went to Shepherdsmead together.

Gone was the siesta-like placidity of 1904. Unease was in the air, in 1916; the feeling of the times and the premonitory disquiet of calamities yet to come. Before the station now stood only two shabby taxicabs. The driver of one touched his hat to them.

'Are you for Mrs. Yeoman's, gentlemen?'

'Yes.'

'Miss Beatrice will be here immediately.'

'Right, thanks. Bob Straw isn't still here, I suppose?' asked Mark.

'No, sir. Bob joined up when the war began. He's in France.'

From the bridge, while they waited, Mark showed his brother Yeoman's Farm. A line of cheap shops had partly shut the old house off from the open road on which it had gazed for centuries. It looked neglected. But still fowls pecked about the farmyard, and in the door stood the farmer.

'So that's Yeoman's Farm! Funny to think you and I might be farming instead of soldiering, Mark, if our great-grandfather hadn't disliked railways. Look at that chap. One of the indispensables, I suppose.' Thus they talked, as young soldiers talk in every war; and below them the other young man, who would be richer for the war, cast a casual eye around, glanced up at the two on the bridge, and went indoors.

Clip-clop, jingle-jangle. A small middle-aged lady in a shabby stub-cart drawn by a fat brown pony.

'Ah, there you are, Mark, old chap. How are you? And is this the great Captain Patrick? Good gracious, what a giant you are, Patrick. And how well you both look. Jump in, old things.'

'Aunt Beatrice, surely this isn't the same trap that you met father and me with when I was a boy?'

'Yes, it is, dear. We are not using the car during wartime, to set an example, so we had the tub-cart out of the stables and it's as good as new. And Robbie's come out to do his bit, like all the rest of us, haven't you, old chap? Gee-up! We must hurry. The vicar and Major Dewlap are there.'

'Major Dewlap? Is that the Mr. Dewlap who was here when I came before. He had a car.'

'Oh, yes. That's right. What a good memory you have, Mark.'

'So he's Major Dewlap now. Is he on leave from France?'

'Oh, no, dear, they couldn't spare him. He's indispensable here. He's at the Ministry of Munitions and goes up to London every day. Poor dear, he's worked to death. We are always afraid he'll have a breakdown.'

'H'm, that would be bad for the war, wouldn't it? I suppose he gets every Saturday off?'

'Oh, yes, Patrick, he has to have *some* rest. But we mustn't talk about our troubles. We want you to tell us all about France, and Australia. It's wonderful to think of you as a flying man, Patrick. Gee-up Robbie. . . .'

Clip-clop, jingle-jangle: the noise of Robbie's hooves and harness was the same that Mark had heard in 1904, but everything else was different. The privet hedges were no longer so prim, and the laurel shrubberies not so trim. The gravelled drives were less tidy and the red villas, unaccountably, much less beautiful. Even the lawn seemed to have shrunk, in 1916, and the cedar tree no longer touched the sky.

The scene and the players were the same but the curtain had been down and risen again some years later. Old Mrs. Yeoman's head nodded now; with hands that shook she knitted some fearsome thing in khaki wool, and she repeated her questions twice as often. On khaki coat young Mr. Dewlap wore *réd* tabs and peacetime medals; 'I expect that's the one he got for his prize pig,' murmured Patrick to Mark. The three goddesses of 1904 were middle-aged maidens, but still they fluttered about their

young Mr. Dewlap and now Mark knew the signs. Old Parson Trout was fatter and rosier. Through the open window Mark saw a pert-looking, rather untidy girl busy about the luncheon table; gone, with Rosie, were demure mien, starched cap, snowy streamers.

'Well, Patrick, old bean, we've heard so much about you. You should have come to see us long ago.'

'Isn't he tall, Beatrice? And isn't the Flying Corps uniform becoming? Do you like flying, Patrick?'

'Surely, Aunt Celia. It's what I've always wanted to do.'

'WHO ARE THEY?' 'Appledore's boys, dear, Mark and Patrick.'

'OH, YES. IS LUNCH READY?' 'Yes, dear, very soon now.'

'I don't suppose you remember me, Mark?'

'Oh, yes, sir, very well. You were here when I came as a child in 1904. Your car was the first one I ever saw, close to.'

'Ah, yes, I was going to take you for a ride but Miss Beatrice wouldn't let us because old Mr. Yeoman didn't like the smell. Well, so you're an officer now!' Still the same sort of conversation, Mark thought.

'IS LUNCH READY?' 'Yes, dear, nearly. Isn't she priceless, Patrick?' 'She certainly is persistent, Aunt Beatrice.'

'I wonder if you remember me, Mark, since your memory's so good.'

'Of course, I remember you, Vicar. And do you remember grandfather's pumpkin?'

'Oh, yes, that was a most unfortunate episode. What an enormous pumpkin it was; I never realized before that coaches for Cinderella actually might be made from pumpkins. We had a lot of trouble about that pumpkin. It fell on a choirboy, you remember? His father sued us for damages and had to be bought off. Your grandfather paid ten pounds to quieten him. Mr. Yeoman seemed to think I was in some way to blame. It was most disagreeable and I had to stop coming to lunch here for a time.'

'Pat, I told you about Grandfather Yeoman's pumpkin, do you remember?'

'Remember? I've laughed about that pumpkin in three continents.'

'Dear, dear, I had no idea our pumpkin was destined for

immortality. I fear the matter seemed anything but funny to me at the time. It was most worrying. And the Bishop was not amused. He seemed to think I had failed in some way in my duty and he was so unpleasant about it that at one moment I was almost driven to believe that I was not fitted for the Church. . . .’

Boom! The gong. They gathered round the big mahogany table, with Aunt Annie at the head. Mrs. Yeoman’s hands trembled too much now for her to share the family feast. The silver glistened, and the pert maid indifferently handed them things, and Parson Trout and Major Dewlap both said they thought they would have a little whisky, and Aunt Beatrice, who served them, said ‘Say when,’ and they both said ‘When!’ and everybody laughed, for this was the latest joke, having been born in *Punch* only five years before, and through the open window, like a dotard talking to himself, came a low, indistinct mutter, a gerrump or kerr-ump, and Aunt Beatrice said, ‘It’s awful to think of that terrible war going on while we sit here,’ and Mark’s mind’s eye saw vivid pictures of the things that happened where that noise began, and he thought how quickly his respite was passing. . . .

‘Too bad you’re so close to it, Aunt Beatrice,’ said Patrick sympathetically, ‘does it worry you?’

‘Oh, of course, we can’t help thinking about Our Boys out there. We do all we can, but somehow there is so little we can do. Major, would you carve a little more meat for the vicar? I don’t know what we should do without the major to carve. None of us are the *slightest* good at carving, and the servants . . . ! But if this new girl leaves I don’t know what we’ll do.’

‘It is most trying for you.’

‘Oh, we mustn’t complain, Vicar. After all, think what Our Boys suffer for us. But sometimes it is almost beyond our strength, what with the food shortage, and the rudeness of the tradespeople, and the war work, and the prices. But we mustn’t talk about that.’

‘No, we certainly mustn’t. Our young friends here are the only ones who have any right to complain. I only wish they would let me go. It was just the same in the Boer War. I did all I could to get out with the Volunteers, but they insisted that I was more use here.’

'After all, somebody must carry on, and I'm sure I don't know how Shepherdsmead would get on without the major, to say nothing of all that work he does at the Ministry. But we really mustn't talk about ourselves. Mark, tell us about the trenches. . . .'

But the conversation would not stay in the trenches. It came always back to the major and his exertions to win the war, and to the trials which the war had brought the Misses Yeoman, and to the wickedness of shopkeepers and servants. Then they all went into the garden and old Mrs. Yeoman was brought out again, shouting 'WHO ARE THEY?' when she saw Mark and Patrick. Tea came, with scones and butter and jam and honey, and Mrs. Yeoman ate as if she had just spent a week in an open boat. And then Aunt Beatrice jumped up and said, 'Come on, you chaps. Let's play croquet'.

Patrick held Mark back as they moved towards the lawn. 'Are they really going to piddle about playing croquet?' he said.

'Yes.'

'Then I'm going.'

'But, Pat . . .'

'I'm going back to Brighton. I want to find a flapper, I want a drink, I want to feel alive. If I stayed here another minute I'd have to pinch myself to make sure I was dead. I'm off. Life's too short.'

And with the briefest of farewells they went, leaving on a green lawn, beneath a big cedar tree, a stuffed imitation Major, a winded Vicar, three flustered maiden Aunts, and a nodding old lady who yelled after them 'WHO ARE THEY?'

As they recrossed the bridge they looked down at Yeoman's Farm. It was evening, and the rooks were busy. The lengthening shadows of the elms laid dark pathways across the meadow. The line of the Downs grew sharper against the twilight sky and from the distance came softly the vibrant gerr-ump, kerr-ump of the guns in France. Each time the noise came, the earth beneath them almost imperceptibly trembled, like an aspen leaf in a zephyr, and Mark felt the bitter loneliness of the trenches and saw visions of stricken flesh. Patrick did not show that he even heard the guns.

'Give me Queensland,' he merely said, as his eyes roved over

the little behedged fields. 'You can breathe there. Come on, Mark.'

Thus in 1916, as in 1904, Nelly Yeoman's hopes were disappointed. No happy transformation in the family scene resulted from the meeting between her sons and their kinswomen; the brothers agreed that the household at Shepherdsmead was like a cemetery and made her affectionate reproaches for wasting some hours of their leave.

And when they returned, Mark found Sally waiting, as he thought, for him. Having learned that they were at home she came, flushed and excited, in search of them.

Mark had to learn about women some time, and now he received a lesson. He tasted the bitter disappointment of the young man returning from war with romantic expectations. He was disconcerted at first when he greeted Sally with the tacit assumption in his manner and his eyes, that she would now hug him, squeeze him and so forth. He found no eager response in her, but rather reserve. When their glances met, they were not like flint and tinder; hers was wary. For many months in the trenches he had titillated his imagination with the thought of this evening. Now, when he impetuously prepared to take her out and looked for the happiness he expected her to show, she said artlessly, 'Isn't Pat coming, too?' and Pat said, 'Sure I am'.

He received a staggering shock of humiliation, and was too callow roundly to tell her, and Pat, that Pat was *not* coming, too. Instead, he made his old mistake; he pretended an indifference which most clearly revealed his jealousy and an evening of torment began. They took Sally to dinner. She did not even trouble to spare his feelings. She fired the dark salvo of her eyes at Pat, measured her height against his so that she might press against him and look up at him. Pat looked at Mark with an open hint of irony in his gaze, but Mark refused to take that hint.

He saw the incredible truth; that he was not wanted; yet he refused to see it and tried to convince himself that he was mistaken. He reminded himself of his passionate leave-taking from Sally in 1914, of her words, and of his long vigil in the trenches. Surely no woman could be so base as to let him down after all that!

She openly threw herself at Pat and did not hide her impatience with Mark. He pretended to see nothing, to be enjoying himself

among the rose-shaded lights and the laughter and chatter, as he sat opposite to Sally and Pat. 'You don't mind if I sit next to Pat, do you, Mark?' 'No, go ahead.' He knew they held hands under the table.

If Mark, after this evening, ever again allowed Sally to fool him, he had only himself to blame, for she was as ruthless as only an infatuated woman can be and showed him that she would stick at nothing to gain her end. They went to the theatre and Mark, although he would not look, knew again that her hand was in Patrick's and heard conspiratorial whispering. At the interval she went out and Pat, a moment later, followed her.

They did not come back. After a while Mark, feeling that the whole audience knew of his betrayal, slunk out.

He hated Pat, Sally, himself and his leave. He wished he had never come home; he wished he were back in the trenches. He was bitterly humiliated and had been made to feel the worst kind of an idiot. If he could have found them, he would have smacked Sally's face and thrown himself at his brother. He walked about thinking of the things he would say and do to them if he met them. He felt the raging unquiet of a young man physically thwarted. He tried to control this turmoil within himself, and suddenly felt quite calm, so that he thought he had succeeded. Suddenly he saw how unimportant it all was, how ridiculous. Then, like toothache, it returned, a restless dissatisfaction and desire that would not let him be still. The evening was young. With some half-formed notion of showing his contempt for Sally, of getting his own back on her sex, he walked to the station, caught a train to London, and went to the Empire.

Mark knew all about the Empire, and the promenade at the back of the circle. The knowledge belonged to the liberal education he had received from his fellow chorus-boys in *Wedding Bells*. There were girls at the Empire. Sally had let him down. How stupid his romantic dreams in the trenches of her surrender to him when he came home, of his first venture into these delights, now seemed. Well, he would find somebody else. At the Empire he could find plenty.

The wide promenade and the big bar were packed with girls and young officers. He stood awhile, watching the crowd and looking for a girl. It was not easy, for in that throng of young

officers sharpset from the trenches the women were more sought after than seeking. Then a group near him broke up and he saw, standing with her back to him, a woman alone. She wore a lace blouse which stimulated conjecture about her charms. Mark said over her shoulder, 'Good evening. May I talk to you?'

She turned with a smile which faded as if wiped by a sponge when she saw him. The painting that was presented to him was clearly intended to be that of a girl of seventeen; nevertheless, Mark saw it was indubitably Mrs. Loveman. He felt like a man caught in attempted incest and was lost in confusion. She recovered first from the shock.

'Why, Mark,' she said. 'It's difficult to believe that you are grown up. Fancy you an officer? Are you going to France?'

'I've been there, Mrs. Loveman,' he said, blushing like a small boy surprised in the jam cupboard.

'Oh,' she said, compassionately, 'your poor mother. Oh, I am so grieved for her. She is so sweet. What are you doing here, you silly boy?'

'Oh, just an evening out, you know. . . .'

'Mark, you don't need to come here for an evening out. Get yourself a nice girl, someone of your own kind, and make love to her. There's no shortage of girls. You used to run round with that little Sally, didn't you. Why don't you take her out? She's pretty. A boy like you doesn't want to waste his time in the Empire promenade.'

'Well, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Loveman, I was a bit fed up. My brother Pat and I took Sally out and they sneaked off and left me sitting.'

'Oh, that's how the land lies. Well, Mark, I'm afraid you've got a lot of competition to beat when your brother's about. He's a way with him. But don't let a little thing like that upset you. A boy like you can find all the girls he wants. And now, I'm not going to have you here. You make me feel like a grandmother. You make me feel nervous, too.'

In the most friendly way, she took his arm, and they went down the big staircase together, and out into dimly-lighted Leicester Square. They took a taxi and at Victoria, where the boat-train was filling with officers returning to France, she said to the driver, 'Wait here', and went with Mark to the Brighton platform.

'I don't know why I let you pack me off like this, Mrs. Loveman,' he said. 'I'm quite old enough to know what I want and . . .'

'No, you're not,' she said, 'or you wouldn't have let your brother run off with Sally. You wanted her, didn't you? You run along home, Mark, and to-morrow you pick yourself a pretty girl and parade her under that young Sally's nose. That's the sensible thing to do, not this. And tell your mother you met me, but don't say where, and say I sent her my love. And don't forget, Mark, find yourself a little shopgirl, and forget all about being shy and reserved, and make violent love to her before you go back to France. Don't come to the Empire again. You made me blush to-night and I didn't think I could.'

In this way Mark, who set out in search of a night of sin, came back to Brighton by the last train with his ears burning from a motherly chiding. Looking back afterwards, he hardly knew which of his two adventures that evening made him feel more ridiculous. Pat's bed was still empty when he fell asleep, but when he awoke Pat was in it, and Mark jumped out and shook his brother awake.

'What? What's that?' Patrick struggled to remain asleep. 'What do you want?'

'Wake up, you! Wake up! What the hell do you mean by leaving me like that last night?'

Pat sat up, 'blinked, and was at last awake. He smoothed his hair with his hand, looked at Mark, yawned, and then grinned.

'I'll give you three guesses, digger.'

'What does that mean?'

'Why, that I wanted to be alone with Sally, and Sally wanted to be alone with me, and you wouldn't take a hint, that's what.'

'But Sally came out with me. That's a damn fine trick to play on your brother.'

'Well, what are you going to do about it?'

'I've a damned good mind to knock your head off.'

'That's a joke! Look here, Mark, come awake. If you want a girl to like you, knock *her* head off, not the other fellow's. She'll appreciate it. But if the other fellow's quicker than you are, the joke's against you. Don't let him get away with it and then complain because he's your brother. If you wanted Sally, why didn't you take her? Just you remember, young feller, love's a

very shady business, not an affair of honour. The only rule is, to get in first. You don't expect a girl to prefer you if she sees that another feller tried harder to get her, do you?"

"You're a swine, Pat."

"Ah, be grown up, boy. Don't waste your young breath on calling your big brother names."

Pat turned over and went to sleep again, leaving Mark to his indignation. He could not find any answers to the argument as Pat stated it. He went back to France a sadder man who thought himself a wiser one, and before very long was to change his mind about that. He thought now that he had learned all there was to know about women, and Sally became to him the symbol of their perfidy. He laughed bitterly at himself when he thought of the dreams with which he had come home.

For all the others, however, this was a good time. Appledore liked to go out with his two soldier sons. They now looked on him with the scrutiny of manhood and could find nothing of the heroic Appledore they had seen as children. He tried to take an interest in the trenches but they felt the laboured nature of his questions and would not pander to them. They saw that his life was unchanged by the stupendous events of their time, that their ordeals meant nothing to their father. He still went to town each day, still watched the cricket, still spent evenings with 'a certain lady'. He still had his 'money troubles' and to these inevitably he adverted.

"They pay you well in the Flying Corps, don't they, Pat?"

"Not so bad, father."

"Well, if you've anything to spare, your father could use it. I don't know where the money for the rent is coming from." They both tipped him.

The happiest of these four people was Nelly Yeoman. Both her sons were home, both were officers, the little room upstairs was occupied again, her neighbours greeted her with sympathy and respect. Nelly Yeoman found that she could, at need, 'get about'. She reached the front between Mark and Patrick, and even the West Pier. She let them take her out to dinner.

If she could have reached up to stay the sun on its course, to prevent the inexorable night from killing, one by one, these few supremely happy days, she would have done so. Most of all, she

loved the late evening when they both went upstairs to bed, and she could think of them as the babies she had once held in her arms, in those placid 'nineties, in the days when her wedding at St. Margaret's and the reception at Romano's were still near and dear, not merely mocking echoes from the past, when the future still looked secure and hopeful.

Nelly Yeoman was happy then when she tidied up downstairs and heard both her sons' footsteps mounting once again to the little room upstairs: once again, and for the last time.

CHAPTER 12

ON a blazing July day in 1916 a group of young British flying officers sat in the garden of the Moulin d'Or, a restaurant in Amiens. The gruff rumble of the guns constantly reminded them that they were only on brief loan from the greatest carnage in the history of mankind. The contrast between the midden of death, to which they must return, and the peaceful scenes around them, was overwhelming, for they were surrounded by all that made life desirable: busy marketwomen, neat housewives and pretty shopgirls thronged the market opposite, where apricots made golden mounds, and melons great yellow mountains; they ate and drank well beneath the striped umbrellas in the pleasant garden; and smiling Madeleine, the pretty daughter of the *patronne*, waited on them.

Yet they offered the beholder a picture of youthful zest, these pilots and observers, who were laughing loudly because their leader, Captain Yeoman, was telling them, while Madeleine filled his glass, of the violent emotions which her nearness aroused in him.

'I say, skipper, suppose she understands what you're saying.'

'Boy, that's just what I'm hoping for. There's nothing a girl likes so much as a straightforward announcement of dishonourable intentions. Madeleine, Madeleine, what could I do to you!'

The young men laughed in the uproarious way of such youngsters, whose physical instincts are quickened by their enforced segregation from women. Madeleine heard her name, but chose

to suspect no offence; she looked at Pat and smiled with tranquil dignity.

'I thought you came into Amiens to meet your brother, Pat.'

'So I did, my intrepid young birdman, but I think I'll let you fellers take him back to the aerodrome with you. I want to stay and tell Madeleine what's on my mind.'

A little later a young infantry officer, trench-stained, came out of the station entrance at the side of the market place. Pat saw him and sent a tremendous 'coo-ee' across the street. Mark looked, saw the merry group in the garden, waved, and came over. There was a boisterous reunion, watched with a smile by Madeleine. Then he sat down, at Pat's side, among gay young men with wings on their coats who made him welcome and showed deference to his brother.

Mark was just twenty-one, and after twenty months in the trenches this was nearly paradise. At last, he was released from the soul-sickening sight and smell of that stricken waste, where only vermin thrive, and men became like vermin, and from the idiocy of that battle, in which great armies of civilized adults blew each other to pieces without catching sight of their enemies or gaining more than a few square yards of pulverized dust. He had turned his back on those other young men who silently rose at dawn and dusk and looked towards each other and then lay down again in their ditches, to prove the high art which generals had made of warfare after thousands of years of experience. He had left all that, and here at Amiens Pat waited for him in a pleasant garden, with merry young men around him and a lovely girl smiling at them. . . .

It was like being born again, and for the rest of this ensanguined summer of 1916 the war would resemble, for Mark, the romantic business which war is in a schoolboy's imagination. The meeting at Amiens was the result of a plan made by the brothers, during their leave in England, to try and get Mark transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and even to Pat's own squadron. Observers were badly needed, and by miscalling themselves the obedient servants of many senior officers, they had succeeded.

Mark Yeoman, as he sat in the garden of the Moulin d'Or, felt as if he had at last touched the delightful reality of the dreams he and Patrick had dreamed on the clifftops at home. They were

in a foreign city, they wore a swagger uniform, to-morrow they would fly!

When at last they all drove off towards the aerodrome at Beauville, Pat was missing. Mark's friends grinned and gave him to understand that Pat had stayed behind to lay siege to Madeleine. When they reached the aerodrome Mark found a camp-bed waiting for him in Pat's tent; but Pat's bed remained empty until dawn, when Pat, having found transport by some private magic, stumbled in and awoke his brother.

'Hullo, young feller,' he said, 'you're a fine chap, running off and leaving your brother alone in a dangerous place like Amiens.'

'Pat, you're a disreputable old pirate. How come you to be so lecherous?'

'Well, somebody has to have a little enterprise in our family.'

'Did you succeed with Madeleine?'

'No, she stalled me off. But I shall have at her again. I'll try everything from tears to mesmerism. If Madeleine thinks she can play fast and loose with me she's wrong. Come on, get up and fly.' The great moment came, when Mark saw the countryside dwindling beneath him to doll's house proportions, and then collapsing into the flatness of a map.

Within a week he flew over the trenches as Pat's observer; in the first Air War there were no long training courses. Pat was the ideal pilot. He only cared for flying and women, and of the two loved his aeroplane better, and he was of a tempered, calculating recklessness. From the talk of the mess Mark learned that his brother, who wore the ribbon of the Military Cross, was expected soon to be given command of a squadron. As a flight-commander, indeed, Pat had already more than realized his boyhood dreams: he flew an aeroplane (which was even better than a ship) and was a leader of men.

In the clean upper air Mark's trench-sick nerves tautened. Even death, up here, seemed much better than death in the trenches. Below him he saw the trench-line, which had seemed to him, its captive, enormous and inescapable. Now it was but a tiny scar on the good earth, and he could hardly believe that the little balls of cotton wool, which blew about it, were the shattering shellbursts he had known.

And the beauty of flight held them both in thrall. The visions

of high adventure, which they had seen from the cliffs at home, fell far short of the reality they now experienced when, on quiet evenings, they went roaming among the white peaks and mysterious valleys of the cloudtops. Here was the zest of mountaineering, freed from the chains of earth-bondage. But the shadow-side of this exhilaration was the ever-present thought of the war. Their generation had been given the gift of flight, something of which mankind had scarcely dared to dream, and had then been sent to use it in the greatest war mankind had ever known: a more mocking trick could not have been played on them.

The brothers flew together above the profligate, useless battle of the Somme. Dawn patrol and twilight patrol, misty morning and gunlit dusk: all these they shared. They crashed, unscathed, when their undercarriage was shot off by archie. They fought off three red German scouts, shot one down, and escaped into cloud. Together they drove into Amiens for dinner. Alone Mark drove back, while Patrick resumed his siege of Madeleine, who at the third attempt capitulated. Pat, heavy-eyed and tousle-headed, returned next morning just in time for dawn patrol.

'You'll be court martialled yet, Pat.'

'Aw, to hell with that. Why should I leave Madeleine to some patent-leather staff-captain who still wets his napkins. Well, third time was lucky for me, digger. You know, these French girls have something that gets me. If I stayed here I'd be getting married before I noticed where I was going. That's the fate worse than death, Mark, and don't you forget it. Still, she's a fine girl, Madeleine. I only hope she had as much fun as I did. But I doubt it.'

'You're a hog, Pat.'

'That's right.'

In October Pat went on leave, uttering bawdy prophecies about his reunion with Sally.

'Can't you leave Sally alone? I should have thought Madeleine ought to be enough for you.'

'Digger, you can't have enough girls. As long as you don't marry one, that is. One wife is one too many. I've got to have someone to run around with, and why shouldn't it be Sally. Mark, you're not still dreaming sweet virginal dreams about Sally, are you? Got her out of your mind?'

'I suppose so.'

'Addaboy. The trouble with you is, you want a woman.'

'You mind your own business. I could have had women if I wanted.'

'Then why didn't you?'

'You seem to think it's all-important.'

'Oh, it's pretty important all right, all right. The only reason you haven't is that you're too darn shy, Mark. I'd hate to be your age and . . .'

'Oh, shut up.' Mark wanted to say, 'Have you had Sally?' Instead, he said, 'How do you set about it, then, Romeo?'

'What, getting a girl? Easy. Look 'em straight in the eyes. Get a hold on them and squeeze 'em. Tell 'em they're lovely. You can't lay it on too thick, they're like children with sweets. But keep laughing and joking. Never let 'em think you're serious, except about one thing. Make 'em feel that you *want* 'em; that's the important thing, it makes 'em weak. That's all they really care about, anyway. But never let 'em feel they've got *you*.'

'You think you're very Casanova, don't you, Pat? Why can't a man wait until he finds a girl he wants to marry?'

'Because they don't want it like that. Women hate a novice. They gloat over a man's past. If he hasn't got one they'll make up one for him. They love to think other women find him irresistible; it puts up their own value. Most women would turn back at the altar if they were given proof of their husband's virginity. Fortunately it's beyond proof. They're able to disbelieve him even if he swears to it. The whole foundation of humbug and hypocrisy, on which our social order is built, would collapse if men had maidenheads. . . .'

'Oh, *shut up*. You make me feel that life is a dungheap. You sound like some randy old rooster.'

'That's me to the life. And you talk like a babe in arms. But you'll learn, boy, you'll learn. You'll beg your big brother's pardon yet, for them unkind words. So long, kid. I'll give your love to Sally.'

Roaring with laughter, Patrick went off to Sally. Mark lay thinking with jealous envy in his heart. The thought of Pat and Sally stirred almost intolerable physical unease in him. Patrick's words painted an attractive picture, of a reckless besieger,

armed with a laugh, two strong arms and lusty appetites. Mark could not imagine himself taking a woman like that, and resented his ignorance of the warmer side of life, which Pat thus invaded. But the locked door was about to open itself to him.

That summer of death, as if to mock suffering mankind, lingered far beyond its time. One blazing October afternoon, Mark, his day's flying done, strolled away through the woods by the aerodrome to the river Somme, where he lay down among tall grass and looked dreamily into the slowly-moving water. In his stomach was the unrest of the young flying-man, who lives from day to day like a condemned man reprieved. The peace about him broke off with a jagged edge in the near distance, where the guns muttered.

After a little while he raised his head and watched the glittering dragonflies, thinking, as all such men thought, that it must be good to live, in whatever outward form, and not to have to fear death, and when he looked back into the water he saw another face reflected there, and other eyes looked into his. He had not heard her come, on the grass. He turned on his back and looked up, and she smiled down at him. Her skin was almost the colour of the apricots which grew so abundantly hereabout; her eyes and hair were dark; she had a long, full throat and rounded arms. She was Jeanne, and she was desirable, and she came from the farm close by. He felt shy: the constant cronyship of death had not taught him boldness with women.

'Good day, mademoiselle.'

'Good day, M. le Lieutenant.' Thus simply it began. 'You are aviator?'

'Yes, observer, as you see.'

She sat down on the grass beside him while he lay on his elbow, and they talked, and studied each other. It was hot, with a disquieting heat that made the blood bubble like the water in a boiling kettle. They talked, and soon, without any word said of such things, they were no longer two strangers but two young human beings who desired each other.

'You are very young.'

'Oh, not so young, mademoiselle. I am twenty-one.'

'Ah, I am only seventeen, but I am much older than you. You are a child, monsieur, and timid.'

'Timid!' He laughed coltishly, as who should say, 'I? I, who for two years have faced death?'

'Yes, timid. Not as a soldier, but with me, you are timid. See!' She leaned over and kissed him lightly. She was gone again, as quickly as a butterfly, and was almost out of his reach before he realized what he had to do. He seized her and held her, and kept her mouth pressed down on his until little dewdrops of warmth crept from their joined lips, and she gently released herself.

'Not so fast,' she said, smiling, 'it is too hot. Now you want to show me just how brave you are, because I called you timid. Mon dieu, it is hot.'

She looked at him speculatively. He was irritable with himself. Here, he knew, was something he wanted, and he did not know how to take it. Repression lay strong on him. Here on the river bank . . . suppose someone should pass . . . would she be shocked, or did she know what was in his mind . . . how could he imagine that this lovely girl would feel what he felt. . . . The restlessness of his blood broke on his ignorance of women. One part of him wanted this woman frantically and almost took her, fiercely, hungrily. The other part, the queer English part, hung back, and whispered in his mind's ear that you did not reveal such emotions, and when you felt them you tried to make your face look as much like a horse's face as possible.

'Come with me,' she said, 'I will make you some coffee.'

Mark very nearly said, 'Oh, no thanks, I couldn't dream of bothering you. I'm not thirsty. Please don't trouble.' The words were on his lips, when he suddenly saw everything clearly, in her eyes. He took her with such strength that her slender waist seemed likely to snap; he felt her flutter like a bird in the hand. If the boastful Patrick had seen, he would have approved. She gently pressed him away, stood up, and they went across the field to the farm. Papa was at the front, Mamma was away (this was Sunday). In the big, white-walled room, with its gleaming copper pans, she said, 'A little moment, yes? I will make coffee', and he took her hand and said, 'Jeanne, I'm not thirsty — for coffee', and her eyes opened with pleasure and passion at that and she threw her arms around him and said, 'You please me', and drew him into her room. . . .

The dusk fell, and the battle noises, which came through her window, took on a sharper edge in the evening hush. In the trenches, Mark thought, the young men were standing up and turning their faces towards each other, in that strange salute which the rising and the setting sun, shaking its bewildered old head, always saw them perform. He pitied them unspeakably, and thought, 'There, but for his transfer to the Royal Flying Corps and this lovely Jeanne, goes Mark Yeoman'. When it was dark she drew the curtains and lit the lamp. In the placid troughs between the crashing wavetops of passion he felt deep thankfulness towards the girl who lay beside him, and a physical, pagan gratitude that he had not died without knowing this.

It was nearly dawn when he left. Mamma was gone to Paris, to a brother's funeral, and would be away for some days. They arranged that he should come again whenever his duty allowed.

'Come again, then, to-morrow, Mark.'

'Yes, as soon as I have finished my flying duty.'

'Ah, you must fly again to-morrow?'

'Yes, every day, unless the weather is bad.'

'I detest this wicked fine weather. I shall pray for rain.'

'I too, Jeanne.'

He went back that night, through the dark woods, in a state of triumph and jubilation. He might have been the only man in the world ever to possess a woman, so cockahoop felt he. He grinned derisively to himself when he thought of Sally. He had more than repaid her for her treatment of him. Well, anybody could have her now, for all Mark cared. He felt slightly superior even about Jeanne. A nice girl, but he had had her, and there it was. . . .

The morrow humbled him. By the afternoon he was frantically impatient to see Jeanne again, but could not, because the weather was between fair and unfit-for-flying and 99 Squadron had to stand by all day to see whether it would make up its mind. It did not, and when they were released it was too late to go in search of Jeanne. By the next morning Mark was in the condition of a starving Oliver Twist. He could not imagine anything worse than failure to see Jeanne again, that day. Fortunately his flying was done early, and before noon he was eagerly scanning the fields for her.

She saw him and came to him, leaving the little farm to the one old man who still worked for them. He watched her coming towards him, and felt his heart swell with gratitude that she had been his, and would be again. She was so slim, and yet so plump; he could span her waist with his two hands, and her breasts filled his hands like ripe fruits. As she reached him he drew her hungrily into the shade of the woods. . . .

'*Tiens,*' she said, smiling but startled, 'Are you the same?'

'No, another. You have changed me.'

'It seems so. But, Mark, softly, softly. . . .'

He was too impatient to listen, and drew her only a little way into the shelter of the trees. It was hot again, hot; the unending summer still waxed, in October. The infernal postman incessantly knocked, saying, 'Make the most of your time, Mark, this may be your last chance'. He knew again the fierce delight of possessing this girl; each time, it was as if you tweaked the nose of death. In the gaze she turned on him wonder at the violence of his passion had already taken the place of scrutiny.

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. Fifteen of these to-morrows Mark knew, after the night he went back through the dark woods, exultant and complete. By day, they roamed the river's course and the woods; by night, she opened her window and he climbed in. In those fifteen days Mark's halting French became almost fluent, and he told her an increasingly ardent tale of love. When he came down from a flight over the trenches he changed quickly and ran, so that no moment with Jeanne should be lost. The thought that death lay in wait for him beyond the woods gave their meetings a bitter sweetness that no lovers, they thought, could have known before.

Pat came back and with astonishment saw Mark's indifference to the tales he wanted to tell, of Sally and England.

'Coming to Amiens to-night, Mark?' he asked, one day.

'No, thanks, not to-night!'

Pat sat up on the edge of his bed. 'Look here, Mark, what are you up to? If I didn't know you I'd say you had a girl.'

'Well, what if I have?'

'Mark! You young devil! I go away and leave a perfectly good young brother, and as soon as my back's turned he goes on the loose. How on earth did you do it? I didn't think there was

a skirt between here and Amiens, except for farmers' wives, all fragrant of the cowstall.'

'Didn't you?'

'I've a darn good mind to follow you and cut you out.'

'Pat, if you do that I'll kill you. I warn you.'

'Well, hark at that! Mark's grown up on me while I've been away. I didn't know you had it in you.'

'Didn't you?'

Mark was gone, with Patrick shouting after him, 'Well, don't forget that you're on dawn patrol with me, anyway, lady killer!'

The ordeal by battle was greater agony than ever before. For a young man plunged into his first love, the daily excursions to the grave and back were exquisite torture. When his aeroplane circled the aerodrome, to gain height, Mark would sometimes see Jeanne in her fields, and wave to her. On a clear day, looking back from the trench-line, where the shells burst about him, he could still pick out her farm behind the woods. Then the picture of her rose, warm and vivid, before his eyes, and his lot seemed cold and repulsive indeed. Each time he returned he raced, exulting, to get out of his flying kit and go to Jeanne. Each time he told himself this could not last, for his friends were going, one by one, and ran faster, so that he might miss no moment with her. Sometimes, in the anguish of their despair, they could not force themselves to separate, and clung together until far into the morning hours. They were never seen. They alone, in all the world, knew of this passionate and desperate idyll.

On the fifteenth day it was dark before he was free, and Jeanne opened her window to him. He climbed in and they talked in whispers for many hours, lying side by side. Some especially urgent impulse caused him to be more tender and more passionate that night than he had ever been with her. Something told him he must use every moment that was left to them. The jubilation they found in their physical unions was already become a secondary thing, with them; they wanted to stay always together, and their hearts were racked with the misery of inevitable separation. They tried to forget inexorable to-morrow, which became to-day even as they clung together, mouth to mouth and body to body.

'Mark, I do not know what I shall do if I lose you now. I

should never have come to you, that first day, that hot, hot day. But it was stronger than me. Is it dawn patrol for you again?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ah, this wicked dawn. It should be always night. Mark, I have such fear. . . .’

‘Jeanne, I die before my own death, when you speak so. Think, I am young, and have only just found you, my love, my happiness.’

‘Do you love me?’

‘Yes. How should I not? You are everything that is dear to me and everything that the war seeks to take from me: life, warmth, happiness. And you, my Jeanne?’

‘At first I loved only the summer’s day, and the heat, and the warm blood in my veins. And then I loved you, I think because your mother loved you, and because of her smiles and tears when she first saw you, because you were hers and are mine, and because you were young and defenceless, in your soldier’s uniform and with your little moustache. Perhaps I did not love you, but only all the men for whom women shed tears in this cruel war. But now I love *you*. And the war will take you from me. . . .’

‘No, I shall not be killed, I feel it. And I will always come back. We will marry. . . .’

‘And I shall be Madame Yeoman! I shall like that. But I shall not like to live in England.’

‘No need of that. I shall be happy to stay here, with thee, Jeanne.’

‘Thou! Oh, that would be lovely. You will be my husband, and we shall stay here, on the farm. Ah, beautiful dream.’ A long pause in the darkness. ‘If only that could be, if only we could stay together. . . .’

‘But we shall, Jeanne. I swear it. I do not believe that I shall be killed, I feel that I shall survive. . . .’

‘And nevertheless, the war will take us from each other. I know it. It is a cruel time.’

‘Oh, Jeanne. . . .’

Never had they clung together so passionately, and both their pillows were wet when Mark kissed her hair and eyes and lips, climbed through the window, crossed the moonlit field, and

went through the woods to the aerodrome. Mechanics and machines were already out; dark figures with torches moved about. An engine started, and its roar, and the odour of the aerodrome, nauseated him. The smell of petrol would recall him from the end of the earth to Jeanne and that morning.

Patrick was already in flying kit, ready for the dawn patrol.

'Look here,' he said, 'five minutes later and I'd have gone up with another observer, and you'd have been for a court martial. A skirt's a skirt, but I'm commander of this flight, and if you ever let me down I'll show you no mercy, even if you are my brother.'

Mark turned with his teeth showing.

'Go to hell,' he said, 'I'm here, aren't I? I'm in time, aren't I? You only got back from Amiens just in time once, didn't you? And I had something better worth being late for than Madeleine. Shut your mouth.'

Pat looked silently for a moment and then laughed.

'Well, well,' he said, 'the tiger snarls. What a surprise packet you are, Mark. You're right. Sorry I spoke. I expect I'm getting windy in my old age. Come on, brother, cheer up. Life's too short to quarrel.'

They went up, two machines together. Macdonald and Legrand, both Canadians, were in the other. It was cold, and Mark, fresh from the warmth of Jeanne's arms, felt his teeth chattering. He thought of ten days' leave which would soon fall due for him: he would spend it with Jeanne. He looked back, trying to pick out the speck behind the woods that was her farmhouse.

He was stunned and appalled when the shell burst. Not even in the trenches had he known any explosion to equal it; it must have been almost a direct hit. As the great black smoke of it enveloped them, and then whirled away, he hardly knew if he were alive or dead. Then he recovered himself, gulped back his stomach, and saw that the machine was intact. Patrick, however, didn't turn and grin. 'That shook him,' thought Mark. Pat was putting the machine over in a gentle bank and losing height. 'Wants to put them off their aim,' thought Mark, but he was surprised, because the other machine was to take some photographs and their orders were to keep close together. Glancing

up, he saw Macdonald and Legrand looking down, and caught the puzzled question on their faces as they swept out of sight.

He cast a rapid glance round and felt a sharp stab of shock and fear as he saw black crosses below, climbing rapidly. He hammered hard on Patrick's shoulder, shouting 'Hun, Pat, Hun!' Then he tried to aim at the approaching enemy, but could not because of the funny way Patrick was flying, so that he looked quickly round again, and saw his brother still sitting motionless, apparently day-dreaming, and flying round in wide, flat circles, losing a little height on each one. He beat his gloved hand on Pat's shoulder, and yelled 'Start splitarsing, Pat, he's on us'.

Pat flew imperturbably on, round and round. A pang of fear that almost made him vomit shot through Mark. He lifted himself half out of his cockpit, pulled himself forward against the rush of air, seized the strap of Pat's flying helmet and dragged his head back.

Half Pat's face was gone. His hand was still on the stick, his feet were on the rudder bars, in the rigidity of death he held the machine on its fantastic course; but Mark looked into a red pulp and drew his fingers away covered with blood and flesh. Retching and shaking from shock, he worked himself back, and a stupendous racket broke out behind him as the German's machine-gun gave its first burst. Deafened, he turned and seized his Lewis gun. The Fokker biplane was close on their tail, and he saw the pilot's begoggled face looking at him over the side.

Standing behind his dead brother, while the aeroplane flew in flat and placid spirals, Mark fired. The tracers seemed to go straight into the German's belly, and for a moment he hoped. But misfortune still had a card to play against him: his gun jammed, and as he struggled to dismount it a terrific blow in the chest knocked him to the floor of the cockpit, where another bullet hit him in the leg.

He lay among his blood and saw pictures: of his mother; of Jeanne; of a friend whom they had buried a few days before, a tall fellow who made a small parcel in a blanket when they took what they could of him from the wreck of his aeroplane; of Pat, on the cliffs at home. He did not feel much pain, but a great weakness, and his mind blurred, his thoughts wandered. He was lucid enough still to fear the crash, conscious enough to wonder

'Am I dying?' and to shrink back from that inky void. In his confused mind's eye vivid images of Jeanne appeared, saying, 'Mark, I have such fear. . . .'

The men in the trenches forgot all else and stared at the antics of a British aeroplane which flew in slow, descending circles, while a German scout made rings round it and repeatedly darted in, spitting, to deal a death blow. 'Why don't 'e *fight*?' they said, and 'Why don't 'e try to get away?' said they. But they cheered when the German broke off, as he came within range of their machine-guns, and they cheered again when they saw the British machine did not plunge to earth, but continued to approach it in leisurely circles. They began to laugh, it was so funny. 'Well, 'e's a cool 'un if 'e is mad,' they said, and "'E's going to land on our side, too', said they. They peeped over, at risk of death; so great is human curiosity!

They saw the aeroplane crash on one wing a mile to the rear, bounce, and crash again on its nose, so that the petrol tank burst with a blinding flash, and instantly a great pyre blazed, so hot, that none could have approached; but the Germans, to make sure, began to shell it.

The fire woke Mark. It gave him a strength which his body had lost. With his machine-gun ammunition exploding all round him, he pulled himself up to the edge of his cockpit, fell over the side, with his injured leg dragging, rolled painfully away out of the blaze, and then rolled further still to put out his burning clothing. His helmet and gloves fell away, mere cinders. 'Still scorched by the heat, he lay, unable to move, while the shrapnel burst over him and a fragment shattered his little finger.

At night they collected him and offered him a cigarette as he was carried in the darkness on a stretcher through a trench. 'No, thanks,' he whispered. They got him to a first-aid station, looked at his blackened face and swollen lips in the light. 'Blimey,' they said, 'no wonder 'e didn't want a cigarette.'

Mark heard voices. 'What happened to my brother?' he said. 'Delirium,' one of the voices said. 'My brother,' he said, 'my brother was my pilot, he was dead.' 'Cor, it was his brother,' he heard the voice say, 'that's a packet for one family.'

They talked as if he were deaf, or dead. He wondered why, and wanted to protest, angrily. It was too bad. Why couldn't

they answer a civil question? He would tell them off; he wouldn't let a lot of base-wallahs fool about with him.

But they took no notice, and he could not see them. The voices seemed to come, first from here, then from there. Everything was so dark, so confused. . . .

CHAPTER 13

SLOWLY Mark climbed out of the black lake, back to the shores of life. Then he began a long journey through a dark tunnel of pain and delirium, at the end of which a small gleam of daylight eventually appeared, and grew bigger, and suddenly proved to be the open window of a hospital in Brighton. He began to improve, and Nelly Yeoman (who could not Get About) toiled daily out to Kemp Town to see him.

One day he was able to tell her about Pat's end. She, who so easily wept, shed no tears. In this she saw the hand of her God.

'He was such a lovely baby,' was all she said. 'I always knew I should lose Pat. But I lost him twice.'

'Please don't grieve, mother dear.'

'My dear, I thank God that I still have you. But he was such a lovely baby.'

One day the nurse said, 'A visitor for you, Mr. Yeoman', and through the one-eyed slit in his bandages he saw Sally. She seemed ill at ease. He realized that she was the kind of woman who was nauseated by the suffering of others and put her unease down to this. He felt no interest in her, for his still misty mind was filled with thoughts of Jeanne. He twitted her about Mr. Piecegood, asking how that great ladies' man fared. She said, 'What's it to do with me? I expect he's all right.' She clearly had something on her mind; presently it came out.

'Mark, tell me about Pat.'

'There's nothing to tell. I don't much like talking about it.'

'Please, Mark. I want to know.'

So he began to tell her and then saw that she was only pretending to listen. He broke off, saying curtly, 'What did you ask me to tell you about it for, if you're not interested?'

'Mark, you are unkind. You know it's been a great blow to me.'

'Don't you think it's a great blow to me?'

'Oh, I'm sorry, Mark. Don't be cross. But it's different for me.'

'I know you liked Pat. You made that clear enough when I came on leave.'

'I see that wasn't nice of me, now. I'm ever so sorry, now, really. But I *did* like him, and he was so jolly.' She suddenly puckered up her face and began to cry into a handkerchief.

'What on earth's wrong now, Sally?'

'Well . . . I was silly. I thought he was in love with me.'

'I expect a lot of girls thought that about Pat. Well, he wasn't, if you want to know.'

'I didn't know that . . . and he took advantage of me.'

'What?'

'Well, he said such things to me . . . and I didn't know whether I should ever see him again. And so I let him. He was the first, truly he was, Mark. And now . . .' Sally disappeared behind the handkerchief again.

An enormous problem suddenly loomed up before Mark, increased the pain in his head and chest, the weight on his leg.

'I don't know what I shall do. I'll kill myself.'

'How far are you, Sally?'

'Three months.'

'You'd better go now, Sally. I'm not up to much excitement just yet.'

Inside his bandages, the thought of Pat and Pat's child travelled round and round his head and became an obsession to him. He was not in his senses. He lay and fretted, and longed for Jeanne, and sometimes awoke shouting and shaking because he thought the Hun was on their tail again. Then, in this confused picture, appeared Sally and the impending child, and everything became mixed in his mind.

In this strange way he came by a wife. Nelly Yeoman's appeals could not move him and Patrick's own warnings had vanished from his darkened mind. He had a confused idea about duty. Sally stood at his bedside while he put the ring on her finger. In June the child was born and Mrs. Mark Yeoman, with her baby Roger, went to stay with her mother in the twitten until Mark was about again.

Sixteen months after his crash he left hospital. The soldiers who first saw him lying by the wreck had written him off as dead; but those untidy people, Appledore and Nelly Yeoman, had somehow bequeathed to him a body which emerged as good as new from this ordeal. His wounds had healed well; his face scarcely showed the marks of the flames; he lacked only a little finger.

A man shanghaied into wedlock, he began his married life on a month's leave and two hundred pounds of accumulated pay. He took Sally and the baby to a little hotel at Rottingdean. Sally, whose crestfallen face had cleared like magic when she had his ring on her finger, loved the part of officer's wife. It was happiness to her to sail into the dining-room, bowing to the other officers' wives and the elderly couples who whiled away the war there. Her ambition was to appear in a series of different frocks, and the two hundred pounds rapidly dwindled.

Mark soon saw that she looked on him as an adornment for herself, that she was vain, selfish and stupid. She had coarsened a little after Roger's birth and the midsummer of her beauty was waning. Her dark eyelashes were too dark now, her fair hair too fair, and the other women looked appraisingly at these even while they sweetly told him, 'Your wife is *so* lovely, Mr. Yeoman'.

The child, in whom he saw no likeness to Pat, mocked his quixotry. He had pictured himself caring tenderly for Patrick's son. He could not; he felt nothing for it. It ailed, and Sally complained that she ought to have a nurse for it, so that she could have some freedom. For their bed, she kept a special demeanour which shocked and repelled him. She assumed an artificial coyness, a prurient prudery, to disguise a frigid apathy.

During this, his fantastic honeymoon, the sharp sea breezes cleared Mark's head and he saw the mad thing he had done. He only saved himself from a crisis, born of self-reproach, by telling himself that what was done, was done, and he must make the best of it.

But even that argument collapsed when he thought of Jeanne. Sally was responsible if his physical longing for Jeanne now devoured him, so that he would spring up and begin pacing the floor, and Sally would say, 'What is wrong with you, Mark? For goodness sake stop it. You give me the fidgets.'

He would look at her with hatred in his heart. The strain of this situation was too great; something had to give. The prospect before him was that of employment until the war ended (for he had been told he would not be sent to France again) as a ground officer at some aerodrome, with Sally living in the nearest hotel among other officers' wives. He could not face it. He was at the point of violence on himself, or on her. He went to London, sought at the Air Ministry his former commanding officer in France, and begged so fervently to return to Squadron egg that he came back to Rottingdean with his travel warrant.

'Mark! I thought you wouldn't have to go to France any more.'

'Well, apparently I was wrong. I've got to go.'

'Oh, it's not fair. I believe you *asked* to go back. You're so funny. What will become of me? You might be killed.'

'I get more pay when I'm in France. And if I'm killed you'll have a pension.'

'As if I cared about a pension, when I want you. I don't know what I'll do.'

She began to cry, but he saw that the argument about a pension was comforting to her. She cheered up when the other wives, informed, expressed sympathy. The part of the little woman at home, waiting for her soldier boy, appealed to her. Mark found a boarding house in Hove where she would have other bereaved wives to talk to. She mimed grief when he left, but did not cry; it was bad for her eyeblack.

Alas, for Mark's plans. On the very day when he reached France again, in March 1918, the Germans made their last great attack and soon Jeanne's farm was far behind the enemy lines. He tormented himself with worry about her. Had she, and her old mother, loaded a few belongings on a handcart, like the refugees he had seen in 1914, and trudged off Pariswards? Had they stayed, and had the battle raged round the farm; were they now being forced to feed and quarter Germans?

His imagination became morbid, himself morose. He threw Sally's ill-written letters away, half-read and unanswered. The smell of the aerodrome, the laughter in the mess, the screeching of the gramophone, his own escapes and the deaths of his companions, all added up to misery. He hated the war and feared the future. His friends seemed to have an ordered pattern in

their lives; they had well-laid plans and home lives on which they could build. His own future was uncharted and he was burdened at the start with a useless and unloving wife. He was not sure if he wanted to survive the war. When his leave came he did not even tell Sally, but went to Paris, found a girl with a flat in the Avenue Wagram and spent his money and time with her. She made him laugh and he was grateful to her. He was very thin, drank and smoked heavily, and was exhausted in body and spirit. He could hardly bear to look at an aeroplane.

When he came back Squadron 99 was flown. The British line was moving forward and the Great War, that petty episode, was nearly over. For a few weeks more he flew over the battle and looked down on flag-waving, ecstatic people in liberated townships.

The world was in travail. In Russia was enormous, incomprehensible chaos, and a new name, Lenin. Yesterday's name, Kaiser William's, was already unimportant, and Imperial Germany crumbled. All the small nations, the Gallant Little These and Gallant Little Those, were being set free (and before the century was twenty-five years older would all be enslaved again). His own country, and France, were victorious. The world was clearly to be a much finer place and if he could not clearly see a place for Mark Yeoman in it, whose fault was that but his own?

As the British line advanced his hopes revived of going south and finding Jeanne. Had this happened, Sally might never have seen him again: for his regret at his mistake was now all-consuming. But, on November 9th, as he carelessly took his eyes off low clouds to look down at liberated Mons, where the war had begun for his generation, a German two-seater emerged from them and a machine-gun bullet hit him in the knee.

On November 11th he was lifted from a hospital train at Charing Cross, with many others, and put in an ambulance. Outside bedlam broke upon them all. Shrieking men and women milled round the ambulances, threw flowers to the wounded men inside, tried to climb in and kiss them. Slowly the cars moved off, edging their way through the yelling crowds.

In Mark's ambulance lay an officer of the Inniskillings who had been hit by a bullet that entered his eye and came out behind his ear. He was in agony. 'Curse this noise,' he shouted.

'For God's sake get me out of this.' The nurse who sat between them tried to soothe him, but he began to scream, 'Stop that noise, I tell you, stop that bloody noise. *Stop it*, blast you, stop it, stop it, stop it. . . .'

Amid shrieks of agony and of jubilation, with a mortally wounded man raving beside him and the mob howling outside, Mark Yeoman came home to victorious England, to glory and the future.

CHAPTER 14

If, in 1920, Mark and Sally were still together, the wound on the eve of Armistice was responsible. It left him in Sally's net; and when he recovered from it that strongest of bonds, the force of habit, held him to her. A job, a home, meals, Sally's and Roger's future: these were immediate problems, and behind them, gradually, disappeared his dreams of Jeanne; for whom, but for that wound, he would have gone in search on the morrow of Armistice Day.

During the war he had vaguely assumed, because the newspapers told him that 'nothing would ever be the same again', that there would be a better place for the Mark Yeoman who had deserted the Eight Loonies in 1914 to serve the King and Country that wanted him. Now he found that nothing was different, and that Mark Yeoman must struggle hard to live. In the twitten life resumed its daily round as if the great interruption had never been, and forgetfulness grew over its memory like grass on a grave.

Gaslight gave way to electric light; the milkman sold his pony-and-chariot and drove up in a little motor-van; Sergeant Sud, back from the army again, now stood before a dazzling new Picture Palace, laden like a field-marshal with epaulettes, loops and tassels. The young men, whose elder brothers had dreamed of owning bicycles, saved their shillings to buy motor bicycles. The girls, whose elder sisters had gone uncomplaining into household service, wore silk stockings and each morning filed, sheep-like, into the pens of the sixpenny stores. Mark went to London to see the funeral procession of the Unknown Soldier, and

observed damp eyes all around him; but in the known and surviving comrades of that unidentified corpse England showed little interest.

Eight million mothers' sons had been killed but the vision of a new world faded almost before the alcoholic delirium of Armistice Day died away. In the twitten men found that they toiled for existence in the same old world, and agreed that they wanted nothing better, if only they might be left in peace in it. But that boon (like the simple thing, justice, which the Son of God could not obtain on earth), eluded them, as the carrot eludes the plodding ass. Peace, the millions of dead young men had not achieved at all.

Peace, the twitten saw, was more warlike than war. The older people, bred in an age when an earthquake kept the world agog for months, shook bewildered heads over the daily tidings of massacres in Russia and murders in Germany, rearmament demonstrations in defeated countries and disarmament demonstrations in victorious ones, but the new generation impatiently cried, 'Do stop talking about politics, Dad', and hurried off to the Picture Palace.

Through these disappointing years wandered Mark and Sally, with Patrick's child between them. Mr. and Mrs. Yeoman, to themselves, remained Mark Yeoman and Sally Sud, strangers cast together in a crowd. Mark earned money for Sally's food and dwelling; Sally cooked Mark's meals and made his bed. That was the sum of their married life.

While his war gratuity lasted they moved from cheap to cheaper boarding house, and ultimately came to two furnished rooms in the twitten. Now little Roger Yeoman played where once Mark and Patrick had played. Mark, in his officer's overcoat, dyed blue and threadbare, and in shoes trodden to the welt, vainly sought for work. It was always refused him, either with the polite excuse that an ex-officer was too good for such poor employment, or with the malicious taunt that ex-officers thought themselves too good for any employment. He would have tried to get back to the stage, but Sally showed a vixenish opposition. She preferred a starving captive to an absent husband.

'I don't want you going back to that life, Mark.'

'You used to think it was a fine life, once.'

'Well, it's different now, I've got Roger. I should worry about you, traipsing all over the country with those women.'

'I've got to earn money somehow, all the same.'

'That'll work out all right, you'll see. We want to keep together, you and me, don't we, Mark?'

Keep together? He detested this woman. If he had been honest with himself he would have admitted that lack of the energy to leave her alone kept him beside her. She held nothing of his war service. She thought fools got wounded, and clever men stayed at home and grew rich. She often spoke admiringly of a young neighbour of theirs who had not served and was now a popular star in revue, whose name was always in the papers.

'Oh, look, Mark, Tom's coming to Brighton next week. I would love to see him. Hasn't he got on? Isn't he *clever*!'

'Well, he had a good chance to get on, with everybody else away at the war.'

'Perhaps he was one of the wise ones. What good has it done you?'

'I didn't go to do myself good. How can you talk like that? I should have thought you'd have some respect for Pat's memory.'

'Oh, well, I didn't mean it like that, but still . . .'

'But still' was Sally's last word in every discussion. However, Mark suspected that she was right. He knew that he had gone to the war in search of freedom and adventure. All the political sales-talk about its high objects, which he had swallowed at the time, nauseated him in retrospect. He bitterly resented his unwantedness in 1920, but felt that, if he had been duped, the fault was his own.

He had one secret from Sally: Jeanne. She often asked him about 'other women' and seemed disappointed by his meagre record.

'I bet you knew lots of girls in France, Mark. I've heard all about the way you boys behaved out there, while we was waiting for you at home. Didn't you?'

'You weren't waiting for me, Sally.'

'Well, I *was*, after we was married. But didn't you, now?'

'Didn't I what?'

'Know lots of girls out there?'

'One or two.'

'I knew it, I knew you were a devil.' Thus at last he achieved Devilry. 'Did you make love to them?'

'Sally, I loathe your nasty-minded humbugging about with words. If you mean, did I have them, why don't you say, did I have them?'

'Don't talk like that, Mark. I think it's *disgusting*. But *did* you?'

Concupiscent as a rabbit, in deed, when it suited her; prudish as an old maid in a cathedral town, in word; that was Sally. She wanted him to say yes, and would pretend to be revolted if he said yes. He would no more tell her the truth than give a dog a live bird to play with.

Jeanne! She would be twenty-one now. He felt the warmth of the river-bank in his back; he thought of her cool lips, the tender truth of her eyes and words. A physical nausea against Sally rose in him. He got up as of old and began to pace the room.

'No,' he said, roughly. 'I didn't.'

'Well, I must say you're decent, Mark; not like the others.' And she lapsed into a discontented silence.

She was unwise to awaken these memories in him, because they stirred a disgust in him which he was trying to overcome. Sally had deteriorated, at twenty-eight. Her figure was going, and he realized now that it had never been good; she had only had the lissomness of all young things, which veils the lurking grossness. He disliked the rough texture and pasty whiteness of her skin. She had a clownish touch in making-up.

'Sally, you'd look better if you used eyeblack sparingly.'

'Oh, leave me alone, I know what I'm doing.'

'You've lovely colouring, with your dark eyes and fair hair, but you ruin the effect if you make your eyes coal-black and your hair golden. You make a caricature of yourself that way. The art of make-up is restraint.'

'Oh, you're like all the men. You don't like your own wife to make up, but the more other women are made up, the more you look at them.'

'You silly little bitch' (she would exasperate him beyond bounds) 'I *don't* dislike you to make-up. My opinion about women is that the natural product needs any assistance it can get from art.' Mark's tongue was developing a keen edge on the grindstone of his life with Sally. 'I just say that you ought to use a pinch of

peroxide instead of a pailful, and a touch of eyeblack instead of a potful.'

'Well, if you don't like it, you needn't look at me.'

'Since I have to look at you, I'll tell you what your face looks like with all that lipstick and eyeblack. It looks like two prunes and a pimento on a plate.'

'Oh, shut up. . . .'

They were living on lentil soup and fish-and-chips, the cheapest things they knew, when Mark found a job. He had learned to drive a car during the war and now became a motor-car salesman.

His employer, Mr. Jack Saffron, looked as if he had himself been manufactured in a sub-department of a motor-car factory and delivered, freshly enamelled and polished, straight from the works. His appearance was that of dazzling prosperity customary in the motor-trade. He and Mark, posed between a large pot-plant and the off-wing of a second-hand Daimler, became familiar figures in North Street.

Sally, now kinswoman to a Rolls-Royce or two, felt herself to be rising in the world. 'Now there'll be something regular coming in', she said; and she forthwith made sure that Mark's small improvement in life (he earned two pounds ten a week) should lead to his further enslavement, for she badgered him until he paid the first ten-shillings-weekly on a hundred-pounds-worth of furniture and they moved into 'a home of our own' in two unfurnished rooms, still in the twitten.

The daughter of Mrs. Sud was a bad cook and idle housewife, for she came of that generation of English womanhood which refused to learn these things from its mothers, while claiming, and obtaining, more rights over any man who could be snared in wedlock than any women in the world before. Neither did she intend to improve herself in housewifery, which bored her. Yet she saw rosy vistas. The 'home of our own' would turn into 'a flat', then into 'a bungalow with a garden', and even into 'a villa and a maid'. Soon, thought Sally, she would enjoy the full delights (which she envied in others) of being A Married Woman. These were, that she would spend long mornings Shopping in the Western Road (this being merely a bee-like and buzzing progression from gossiping Mrs. Chin to loquacious Mrs. Wag); that she would celebrate every afternoon the feast of Tea, either behind

her own teapot or before that of Mrs. Neighbour, or, better still, in A Teashop; and that she would go almost daily to The Pikchers.

The Pikchers, in 1920, were the greatest thing in Sally's life. She was the sister, the female contemporary, of the dead millions of young men. If they had shown their gaping gullibility by the manner of their death, she proved hers by the manner of her living. Sally, who had no intelligible opinion on any mortal or spiritual thing, remembered every detail of every Pikcher she saw, and knew the private lives of even the obscurest players. She lived fully only in these dark places. The passion and loyalty she could not feel, she knew there at second-hand, and in the darkness would laugh aloud for joy or shed tears of compassion at the trashiest counterfeit presentments of human weal or woe.

Roger, a nervous, whimpering boy, remained a stranger to Mark.

'It's funny he don't seem to take to you, Mark, I wonder why.'

'Perhaps some instinct tells him I'm not his father.'

'He's like me, isn't he?'

'I can't see much likeness, either to you or to Pat.'

'Oo, everybody thinks he's the image of me. Boys are supposed to take after their mother. Are you fond of him, Mark?'

'Why not?'

'I know it must feel funny, but still . . .'

She never showed him any gratitude. He knew that he had married her of his own free will and must not expect her to feel indebted to him. Yet his heart would not reconcile itself with her calm acceptance of his sacrifice.

Appledore and Nelly refused to like either Sally or his marriage. They concealed their thoughts behind sympathetic smiles, but he read their minds like printed pages. He had never known these two hopelessly incompatible people in such agreement. How dared they criticize him, he thought, who had miserably mismanaged their own affairs? Had he not acted from the highest motives? Their cold disapproval bewildered him, and he thought they wronged the memory of Patrick.

Sally remarked nothing of it. Without embarrassment she watched Appledore playing with Roger; but Mark saw the falsity in his laboured joviality. She took at face value Nelly's smile and

'How nice you look, dear', but Mark knew their real worth. Once he had met a hedgehog in a field, and had watched the dainty little beast curl up and erect its spiky armour. Just that, he saw, his mother did, when Sally entered her house.

'Your mother's—so sweet, Mark. And your father is *such* a gentleman. He's awfully fond of Roger.' Mark winced. He knew better.

His parents plodded on, as for twenty-five years, in their little rut of unhappiness. Nelly still sat at her window, fearing her Appledore's homecoming, yet longing to have him home. They never would desert each other, these two who made each other so wretched. Appledore grew more eccentric as he aged. The half-forgotten Kaiser himself would have stared at Appledore's defiantly upcurling moustache; all Kaiser William's other monuments were torn down, but this one remained. Nelly seldom left her window. Mark would see her grey head there, and her profile deeply grooved with grief. When she heard him she would look up, and all the lines would disappear in the sweet smile he knew, that made her look a girl again.

As the War receded, the quarrelsome Peace grew noisier, and the new century entered its twenties, Mark's life was left, a dark corridor, with peepholes through which he saw the world. The pettiness of it galled him. He longed, more even than when he was a schoolboy, to break these bonds and be gone. Looking back, he felt that he had been the victim of a trick, that he was bound to his wife and her child by man-made laws, perhaps, but by none of human right. The resolve formed within him to escape, to fare forth and travel the world. Sally and Roger must look after themselves.

And then, just when his mind was made up, Sally told him that she was pregnant! In their early married days he had expected this; as it did not then happen, he had forgotten it. Now it was a complete surprise, a shock that topsy-turvied all his private plans. The thought that Sally was going to produce a child of his put her in quite a different light.

When her time came, Mark had forgotten his plans for running away. He thought only of the child which was to come. One night he walked up and down before a little grey house, where the nursing midwife lived, saw the doctor come out in the

early morning light, and heard, 'She's had a pretty bad time, but she's all right now. It's a fine baby, a girl.'

He went in and gazed down at Sally. 'Well, aren't you going to look at it?' she said.

He looked at her stupidly for a moment, not understanding. Then he went to the cot, gently turned back the pink blanket, saw a little ball covered with black hair, two tiny hands that moved slightly.

'Are you pleased?' said Sally.

He bent down and kissed her. He was much more than pleased, he was exalted. For the first time he felt that his life had meaning and a pattern, and that Sally had given him this. The two-legged mechanism called Mark Yeoman received its mainspring: a motive. His heart beat gratefully for his wife. If any had asked him, 'Do you love her?' he would have answered, 'Yes, *now* I do'.

CHAPTER 15

THROUGH the unexpected coming of Patricia Mark, who had meant to disappear, seemed fixed in the twitten, and more firmly than ever. The rough edge of his dislike for Sally, whose every word and deed had come to irritate him beyond endurance, so that he would certainly not have stayed another month in their little house, was blunted. Thinking of 'all she had been through', he came to feel that he had been a brute. The things about her which had infuriated him (and that was nearly everything) he now classed as 'Sally's little ways' and he strove to look on them with the good-humoured, masculine tolerance customary in the world they knew.

He was helped to this by the kindlier mien which life took on after Patricia began to toddle about the twitten. Nelly Yeoman kept eager watch for her, and Mrs. Sud, too. Even Mr. Wily would talk to her, and Patricia would answer him enthusiastically in baby-gibberish. The cats, sheathing their claws, rolled lazily over on their sides when she stroked them. The neighbours smiled on Mark and his daughter, and, through her, he found his self-esteem rising.

That most worldly man of the world, Mr. Jack Saffron, whose business thrived, like all others was captivated by her. Meeting them on the Front one day, he expressed this admiration, much to Sally's bliss, for whom Mr. Saffron, in sleek brown suit, that clothed him like an extra skin, shining brown boots, diamond tiepin and gold signet ring combined to form the ideal man.

'Well, well,' cried Mr. Saffron loudly, 'that's a nice job of work. How did you do it, Yeoman?'

'Oh, it wasn't so difficult. You'd be surprised,' answered Mark, whose tongue sometimes surprised himself.

'Oh-ho-ho,' roared Mr. Saffron, fixing Sally (who blushed scarlet) with a bold oriental eye, 'that's a good one', and went his way laughing loudly.

'Mark, how could you say that? I didn't know where to look. What will he think of me?'

'Exactly what he said: that you've done a good job of work, Sally — with a little assistance from me.'

'Mark, you are *awful*!'

Sally returned to the subject later, for any affront to her little conventions shocked her.

'I could have sunk through the earth when you said that to Mr. Saffron this afternoon, Mark. I shall never be able to look him in the face again.'

'Oh, nonsense, Sally. You remind me of Mrs. Smith.' Mark was re-reading a book, *The Smiths of Surbiton*, which had entranced his boyhood but now seemed to him infinitely comic; Sally took it seriously and wallowed in its Edwardian sentiment as in one of her Pikchers.

'What do you mean? Who's Mrs. Smith?'

'You know, Sally, your Mrs. Smith of Surbiton. Wait a minute, where is it. Here, listen to this. Mr. and Mrs. Smith are in bed. "Bracing herself to an effort", inevitably, she "murmurs" to him "Ralph". He, who normally calls her "little woman", says "Yes, kiddie". Then she says "There's something I want to tell you. I can do it better in the dark". And he says "What is it?" And she says, of course, "Can't you . . . Can't you guess?" And he says "Can't I guess? Let me see. Oh!" Then he "tries to read her eyes through the darkness". Then he asks, "solemnly", needless to say, "Do you mean that I may call you 'little mother?'"

Then it goes on, "She spoke no word. But the angels of God heard her answer!"

'It might be you, Sally,' said Mark. 'If you were a henbird in the nest, you'd hide your head under one wing and say, 'Don't look now, dear, but I *think* I'm going to lay an egg.'

'I suppose you think that's funny. I wish you wouldn't say such things. You're so queer, Mark.'

Sally's constant reproaches that he was 'queer' irritated Mark much less now that he had Patricia. That small heiress of the world made safe, the century scoured clean by the Great War, was a lovely child, fat, golden-haired, chuckling. She never hid her face in her mother's skirts but advanced boldly towards life, with wide, inquisitive gaze. To Roger the world was a rattlesnake, poised to strike; to Patricia it was an oyster, and zestfully she prized it open.

Mark made great plans for her future, even before she could walk. Although his own life was made wretched by Sally's housewifely incompetence, he did not think of preparing Patricia for wifehood. That, he thought, might have been worth while a century earlier, when the Yeomans and their like farmed land, when a woman, with her wedding ring, took over linen chests and cupboards, tea-caddies and keys, bread-baking, cheese-making, jam-making and laundry: that *was* a career, and perhaps the best. But those days were gone, and he wanted Patricia to become a doctor, perhaps; or failing that, an artist, sculptor, singer or dancer. He began, almost before she would walk or talk, to foster the instinct of beauty in her. He showed her flowers and encouraged her to draw them with coloured crayons (at a very early age she made remarkably good attempts). He prompted her to dance, freely, as the spirit moved her. He pointed her eyes to the sea, the seagulls, the clouds and cliffs.

Sally watched all this, puzzled. 'You do love Patricia, don't you?' she said, one night in bed.

'Ah yes,' he said, 'I do.'

'Have I made up to you now, Mark?'

'Sally, darling! You never said anything like that to me before.'

'Oh, well . . . I know you think I'm empty. But I'm not as bad as you think.'

'I've never thought you were bad, Sally. I've often thought you didn't care much about me.'

'I've proved that I do now, haven't I? After all, I've given you Patricia.'

'God bless you.'

'Do you love me now?'

'Yes.'

'I love you, Mark.'

Did she? Perhaps a little. They were certainly happier. But Sally was hostile to his visions for Patricia. She showed a dull, jealous antagonism towards something which she felt 'above her' (Sally was acutely sensitive in such matters). Each time he tried to discuss his plans with her, he met this unreasoning antipathy, and soon ceased to talk about them. Sally's talent lay in keeping those about her at her level: she saw in any attempt to rise above it a reproach, and inarticulately resented this.

But Mark did not desist in his schemes. He was resolved that, when Patricia grew up, she would look back on that which he could not: a bright and homely home, loving and united parents, and a happy childhood. He set about to earn more money, so that he might pay the balance he owed for his furniture, and move to better quarters.

He consulted Mr. Saffron, who was becoming a landmark in North Street as prosperity swelled his girth. Jack Saffron always stood, hands in pockets, legs astride, on the threshold of his show-room, and his fair paunch protruded into the street. Mark foresaw that when a few more piping years had rolled it would be a buttress around which people would need to make a small detour. What the wheelwright's and the saddler's signs formerly were to them, Mr. Saffron and his stomach were to his own business. His acquaintances and his affairs of commerce were innumerable. Mark never knew him without a gold cigarette case, a gold watch or a diamond which he had just bought or was about to sell: his pockets were treasuries. His threshold was his mart, and the time he spent on it was well invested. He seldom stood there long without buying or selling something, and Mark studied admiringly the indifferent disdain with which he bargained about a purchase and the ecstatic, stuttering enthusiasm with which he sold the same article. He regarded his fellow-men as fools, but

suffered them gladly because they brought him profit, and looked out on the townsmen and trippers of Brighton alike with a veiled contempt for infidels inherited from generations of Mediterranean ancestors. Mark respected his self-confidence and liked his joviality.

'Trouble with you, Yeoman,' said Mr. Saffron, 'is you haven't *ambition*. Ambition, that's what you want. If I had a little girl like your Patricia I'd get everything I wanted for her. Now, I'm going to give you something, because I like you. I don't give anything away as a rule, not me. I'll give you something I wouldn't give anybody else, something I ought to charge you for, something that'll be useful to you if you'll take it. I'll give you a tip. You'll never get anywhere working for other people. You've got to work for yourself if you want anything. I'm doing myself harm by telling you this, because you're useful to me. If you weren't here I'd have to get somebody else, and I doubt if I'd do any better. You can stay with me as long as you like, providing I'm here myself, but there's nothing in it for you — no real money. Now why don't you start something on your own?'

'But you need capital to start something on your own.'

'Do you think I had any capital when I started selling silk stockings in Athens. Used to sell 'em at a street corner, I did, when the police wasn't looking. And a man who can get over them perishing Greeks can get over anything and anybody, I tell you.'

'Didn't you like Greece?'

'Greece? Like Greece? Don't make me laugh, Yeoman. Greece is all right for rich English tourists, with more money than sense. That's what the Greeks keep that Apocalypse there for, and all them Socrates and the like. Bulgaria's worse. You've got to make every blinking policeman there rich before you earn a penny yourself. Austria's played out. Hungary ain't so bad. But give me England, and give me Brighton. Here's where the money is, and they don't interfere with you, either. A deaf and dumb blind man could make money here. They bring it to you on their hands and knees, and burst out crying if you don't give 'em a nice smile when you take it from 'em. Now, you take my tip, the best one I've got. When you've made a little bit, buy some gold, cigarette cases, watches, and suchlike, and put 'em by. That'll see you through bad times.'

‘How do you mean?’ .

‘Why, look what’s happening in Germany and Austria. Inflation! If you’ve got a bit of gold you can laugh at inflation.’

‘But inflation only comes through war, and there can’t be another war for fifty years at least.’

Mr. Jack Saffron turned on Mark Yeoman an eye laden with the knowledge of centuries.

‘Don’t believe all you hear, Yeoman, or all you read in the newspapers, neither. What I’m telling you you couldn’t buy. Remember it. Gold’s a religion, that’s all.’

Capital: start something for yourself; put by a little gold! Mark could make nothing of such counsel. He felt that, asking for bread, he had been given a stone (he changed his view in later years).

Now, with grim determination, he bent all his efforts on preparing a future for Patricia. His job was a small one; well, until he found a better one he would save something even from his earnings. He did; within a year, by extreme stint, he had paid for his furniture, accumulated fifty pounds, and was ready to change his quarters. He nearly ruined his health, which was still vulnerable from the war, to do it. He succeeded by giving his evening hours, after his working day with Mr. Saffron was finished, to an elderly author who wanted manuscripts typed, letters filed and the like. It meant that he hardly ever saw Patricia or Sally or his home and his weight fell to less than nine stone. But through it he laid the foundation of a small independence, and cleared the way for the future he planned for Patricia.

Then something happened which threatened to sweep away his small savings at a stroke, and which brought out the worst in Sally. Appledore went to Shepherdsmead on one of his rare visits to The Girls, and one morning a letter came for Mark:

My dear Mark, — I am sorry to say that your father is very ill. He had a bad cold when he came here (I fear he doesn’t look after himself enough) and it has turned into pneumonia. We are doing our utmost but we think you should come to Shepherdsmead. We think it only fair to tell you that if anything should happen to him we cannot be responsible for your mother.

Your aff. aunt Annie.

A boiling anger rose in Mark at the affront, cooled by dismay at the thought of new burdens. He told Sally briefly that he was going to Shepherdsmead, and why; left his breakfast untasted; obtained leave from the sympathetic Mr. Saffron; and caught the next train. Among the knick-knacks and bric-à-brac, he confronted the three Aff Aunts in their chintzy drawing-room.

'Where is father?'

Aunt Annie took him upstairs, and he went gently into the little room, now darkened, where he had been comforted by Rosie, long ago. Appledore lay on his side, heavily blanketed, so that only his face showed. He seemed unconscious, and breathed stertorously through open mouth. Mark, who had seen many men dying or dead, watched his father. He did not think Appledore was in danger. He closed the door quietly, and went down. The Aff Aunts, nervous and flustered, awaited him.

'Has father a good doctor?'

'Yes, Mark dear, Dr. Rumbell is very good. He has attended us for years. He comes twice each day, and of course we can reach him at any time by telephone.'

'Oh, that's good. I can do nothing by being here, and I think father will get better. Please send the doctor's bills to me. And if he *should* die, I shall pay the funeral expenses; please remember that.'

'Mark, dear.'

'If I should be needed, please telegraph me at once. Apart from that, I don't want further news from you. I shouldn't have allowed you to help my mother, in any circumstances. You never have done so, and I don't know why you should have thought she or I would accept anything from you. You've never done anything useful in your lives. You've inherited some money; but that doesn't entitle you to write insolent letters to me.'

Three maiden ladies, immured against the roughness of life within their privet and laurel, and already unnerved by the presence of sickness in their house, received their most violent shock. They would have swooned, but that the swooning age was past. Aunt Annie trembled violently; Aunt Beatrice tried to speak, but could not; Aunt Celia began to cry. Mark, in whose mind the contrast between his penurious state and his bold words rose in violent contrast, was attacked by a strong impulse to laugh.

'Mark, really . . .'

'I *told* you not to write like that, Annie.'

'Be quiet, Beatrice. I'm sure I didn't think Mark would take it like this. . . .'

And then Aunt Beatrice began to cry, too, while Aunt Annie grew red from the effort not to. Mark was surprised by their collapse and repelled by their snivelling. What would these flabby beings do if they were pitted against poverty, hunger, cold, pain? They seemed near to dropping on all fours and licking his hand. He felt his own soft side coming up. Before he could feel sorry for them, he walked out.

But his trials were not over, for Sally, to whom he had looked for warm support, began to frown and nag.

'*What!* You said you'd pay the doctor's bill and funeral expenses? Just when we've got a few pounds saved at last?'

'Yes, I did. And I'll do that, too.'

'How could you be so silly. It'll take every penny we've got. Just when we were beginning to see our way clear. And saying that you'd look after your mother, too. How are you going to do that?'

'Well, I'll do it, somehow. I'll earn more.'

'It's taken you long enough to earn what you're earning now.'

'That's my business. It hasn't been for want of trying.'

'Why shouldn't your aunts look after your mother? They've got money, haven't they? Why should everything fall on us?'

'Sally, if you drag my mother into this I'll . . .'

'I suppose you're going to say you'll hit me now.'

'I wonder I don't. Can't you see you've got to stand by me in this? It's a matter of self-respect.'

'Self-respect won't pay any bills.' And *she* began to cry.

'Don't you start, or I *will* give you something to cry for.'

She went out of the room, grizzling. He tried to fight down his bitter sense of betrayal. He could not behave other than his instinct told him; yet he repeatedly found himself called a fool, reproached, looked at askance, when he thought he had acted rightly. He had thought, at this time, to love Sally. Now he hated her, and felt her a traitor and his enemy.

Afterwards she came back and said she was sorry.

'I didn't mean to hurt your feelings about your mother, Mark. I see how you feel. But still . . .'

He never trusted her again, though this gust blew away, and they resumed their affectionate bearing towards each other, united by their pride and happiness in Patricia.

Appledore quickly recovered. Soon he could be seen again, catching the train to town, marching cockily about Brighton, lustily applauding the cricket. While twilight gathered about the new century, long before even its noontide was due, he strutted his little way, preoccupied by his own small cares and petty pleasures. Looking back down the eventful nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties, long afterwards, Mark would hear the faint echo of his voice, among all that vast confusion, shouting, 'Oh, well played, sir! Well held, sir! Well hit, sir!'

CHAPTER 16

SEEN from the twitten, the world looked ever more bewildering as the fog of peace thickened. Like chattering charwomen, set to clear up a mess, the statesmen bustled about; yet made the affairs of mankind always untidier. New calamities continually loomed up: war with Turkey, the collapse of Austria, martial mutterings from Germany, horrid threats of world revolution (how the twitten trembled at them!) from Red Russia. Each time the statesmen hurried off to Swiss lakeside or Italian seaside town; weeks of hot debate followed, then came The Crisis, when the fate of the planet tottered; and then, each time, the sun suddenly broke through. 'Agreement reached at . . .' said the placards. The world had been saved once more and the anxious twitten breathed again (three months later all this began afresh).

From her window sweet Nelly Yeoman followed this idiots' progress with a fierce, matriarchal anger. She was as angry as if she were Britannia herself and felt her throne rock. If she was indignant because that Awful Kaiser had not been hanged, she was driven almost frantic by the accumulating signs that the Germans did not even admit defeat. She detested the growing fashion of blaming the French for all this disappointment, and frequently invoked the memory of the Poor Emperor, so cruelly

humiliated at Sedan ('Those awful Germans!') She loathed Red Revolution in Russia ('The dear little Tsarevitch, Mark, and his sisters, such lovely girls.') She disliked Mussolini ('You'll see, Mark, the King of Italy is wrong to trust that man.') She particularly resented the disappearance, amid the noble protestations of the Peace Conference, of the Kingdom of Montenegro: King Nicholas had a loyal supporter in the twitten.

'After all, Mark, Montenegro was one of our first Allies. Why, look at this little box, that you sent me from the Front at Christmas 1914. Do you remember it? Dear Princess Mary sent each of you boys one, filled with cigarettes and tobacco. I was so glad she married an Englishman, such a Fine Man. Now, the names of all our Allies were on it, and here, next to 'Serbia' is 'Montenegro'. Why should they have done that to an Ally of ours?'

Nelly Yeoman wondered plaintively why victory in a world war had not restored a peaceful world. She was glad when Lloyd George went; for her 'the man who won the war' had always been less than the man who attacked the House of Lords. She was relieved when Bonar Law, and 'Peace and Tranquillity', came; here, she decided as she looked at his picture, was A Fine Man. In Mr. Baldwin, his pipe, and 'You can trust me', when these followed she at once recognized another Fine Man. But Mr. Ramsay MacDonald shook her almost mortally. Like many other mothers of mother's sons, she loathed his bearing during the war, when her own sons fought. His promotion to Prime Minister was a personal insult to her, to Patrick and to Mark, and made the fruits of victory bitter. But she wavered when she saw pictures of him in court dress; perhaps, after all, he was a A Fine Man?

The Lady was her solace; even if the dizzy, whirling world were upside down, England stood foursquare. The Dear Queen and the Prince of Wales, whose journeys about the globe she joyfully followed, reassured her. The wedding of the Duke of York kept her happy for weeks. ('Such a pretty girl, Mark. What a pity she can't be the next Queen. I wonder why the Prince of Wales doesn't marry; I *wish* he would.')

And together with *The Lady* she ruled society, as for thirty years. She went to all the Courts, to Ascot and Goodwood, Hurlingham and Ranelagh, Henley and Wimbledon. She was among the last of the great ladies; few others were so exclusive or censorious. She

still cut Lady Gauchemain dead when they met in these pages; for Lady Gauchemain had been a chorus girl at the Gaiety in the 'nineties, and Nelly Yeoman had never pardoned this. She cast up her eyes when she encountered this ageing minx, thirty years on, among the pictures. Similarly, she looked straight through that old roué, Lord Much Hadham, when she saw him in a top-hatted throng in the Royal Enclosure. The world might have forgotten, but Nelly Yeoman never would, the Hon. Bob Looseleigh's exploits in the year of the Diamond Jubilee. Age did not atone: this portly peer would never receive a bow from Nelly Yeoman. Among her own set (these were chiefly the Dowager Duchess of Woolworth, Lucy, Lady Longtooth, and the Countess of Ullage, Corkage and Umbrage) Nelly felt happy. Gladly she met them each week and reluctantly she took leave of them. They had first met as girls (in these same pages) in 1880.

But Nelly's greatest happiness was Patricia, and for the sake of Patricia's visits she suppressed her dislike of Sally. Mark, who worked from early morn to midnight, fared better in his struggle for money. Mr. Saffron's affairs prospered, and Mark now had the use of a motor-car built in 1907 which, with the hood up, looked like a covered wagon of the prairies. He loved this machine and thought it beautiful.

Sally pressed him to buy a bungalow. A million men had died, yet there seemed less room in England than ever before. Brighton began to elbow its way afieid. Far back over the free Downs, eastward over the green cliffs, westward along the sleepy shore, spread the cheap houses, and soon Mark could scarcely recognize the haunts of his childhood. He saw many bungalows, but calculated the weekly payments would enchain him for many years. So, when 'the lady downstairs' left he took over the little house in the twitten. The rent was cheap, and he and Patricia would be near Nelly Yeoman. After some sulking, Sally recovered.

The Pikchers gained a rival in Sally's affections at this time: The Wireless.

'Mark, can't we have A Wireless? Everybody's getting one now.' (To be able to tell Mrs. Neighbour 'We've got A Wireless', was bliss to Sally. Similarly she longed to join a tennis club, perceiving something inexpressibly genteel in tennis. Unhappily, when Mark yielded, Sally found that Tennis Clubs were full of

Stuck-Ups who were loath to play with beginners. Sally, with astonishment written on her face, repeatedly failed to hit the ball, and finally burst out crying. Her enthusiasm for tennis then waned; she had conceived it entirely as a thing of becoming *bandeaux* (à la Suzanne), tea, new acquaintances, and boastful remarks about Our Tennis Club to her friends.)

The Wireless might have contained the secret of eternal life from the devotion Sally gave it. Mark, returning home, usually found her crouched over the little box, with horned earphones awry on her head, tickling a tiny crystal with an almost invisible wire. ('Shush, Mark, I'm listening in.') For hours she would pursue snatches of song and talk from 2LO — the cat's whisker always shifted just as she had 'got it', and she had to start all over again — or even squeaks which she called The Shipping in the Channel: Sally, who 'couldn't stand opera' delighted in every screech and scratch.

She diligently thwarted Mark, however, in his plans and pleasures. He had ideas about adorning a house. Taste lurked in Mark, and he saw that, given time, he could furnish his home far better by careful piecemeal buying than by putting his head in the halter of the so-much-a-week-companies. He dreamed of the lovely home he would make for Patricia. He could distinguish between good furniture and inferior. He realized the use of white walls, monochrome carpets and vivid ornaments. In The Lanes were dozens of antique dealers, and a few pence or shillings often brought him a piece of Wedgwood ware, a coloured print, or a well-turned writing table.

He reckoned without Sally and her perverted talent for obstruction. She knew all about the home beautiful. The golden rule was that everything should Match. A bulbous sofa and two bulging easy chairs, similarly patterned: this was A Set and the only proper nucleus of a tasteful Drawing Room. For a bedroom, you needed a wardrobe (Mark detested wardrobes), a dressing-table, and twin-beds (Mark loathed twin beds): a fine Sweet, preferably in walnut. She loved Pairs: one picture to her was dull, but two were grand. The mantelpiece, obviously, was only put there to hold a pair of blue-and-gilt vases and a marble clock between. Thus Mark, having joyfully brought home a piece of Bristol glass, would find it banished to the larder ('I didn't want

that old bottle on the mantelpiece, Mark') and a Pair of something in its place.

'I think I'll hang my trousers over the mantel, Sally. They're a Pair.'

'I don't see anything funny in that. I like my house to look nice.'

Mark yielded to Sally with resignation. When she irritated him he reminded himself of her courage in childbirth. Much later, looking back, he thought that he gave her too much credit for this, for by then experience had taught him that women who would faint at the shadow of a mouse faced with equanimity two painful ordeals: those of defloration and childbirth.

Sally suggested that they should take a lodger.

'Mark, why don't we let our Upstairs? Then we'd soon be able to save enough to buy A Bungalow.' ('And you won't have an Upstairs to keep tidy', said Mark's inner voice.)

Thus Mr. and Mrs. Churchtower came to share their little house. They were elderly: he big, taciturn, and heavy of tread as he went upstairs; she, small and frightened-looking. Like a plant that thrives only in its native soil, she had never fully revived after her transplantation from Heidelberg to Brighton, a thing which Mark understood better when he came to look down from a shady terrace upon clustering old roofs, the silver Neckar and the wide green plain beyond.

They were both Germans, long naturalized. Mr. Churchtower's name (literally translated from the original) indicated his village descent. He was a barber and his English was fairly good, save that he could not always master the tenses and, in thirty years, no member of the silent race among which he lived had told him not to add 'isn't it' to his sentences. The Churchtowers had lived Upstairs for a year before Mark divined that the reason for their air of secret sorrow was that they both pined for Germany. After eighteen months they were well enough acquainted for Mark sometimes to go up and smoke a pipe with Mr. Churchtower, while Mrs. Churchtower fluttered round them with much anxious *Ach!*

'*Ach*, goot efening, Mr. Yeomann. Police, take place. Police.'

'Martha, how often must I tell you, it is "sit down", not "take place". My wife speaks English worse and worse, Mr. Yeoman, isn't it?'

'My man is complaining always over me, Mr. Yeomann. I can nothing for it. I have not the head. Police, take place. And now, you will become a good cup of coffee yes?'

'Mein Gott, Martha, will you have a cup of coffee!'

'Ach, I cannot English. But my coffee is good, Mr. Yeomann, you will see. Now I will show you what I can.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Churchtower. You're very kind.'

'Ja, go and make coffee, Martha. It would be better you should speak English as well as you make coffee. The woman is unteachable.'

'Ach . . .' and Mrs. Churchtower would disappear in affright. Mark was long puzzled by the dark reproach which Mr. Churchtower's manner implied, and only slowly came to see that Mr. Churchtower, the Briton, was brooding over the wrongs suffered by Herr Kirchthurm, the German.

'Why did England attack Germany, Mr. Yeoman? The Kaiser did not want war with England.'

'Then why did Germany invade Belgium?'

'Ach, that was only the pretext the English used, to attack Germany. What does Belgium matter to England?'

'Well, we had guaranteed Belgium, and Germany knew it.'

'That was just an alibi for the attack. Why does England interfere with Germany? England has taken possession of half the globe, isn't it? Germany has nothing, no fleet, no colonies. Always England is jealous and tries to prevent Germany from rising. You do not understand Europe, Mr. Yeoman. Germany is the only great culture nation on the Continent, and must take her right place there. If you crush Germany, you will regret it. The French will turn on you one day. Why does England pretend that the neutrality of Belgium is necessary for England's safety? There is no Belgium between England and France, and the French have a very big navy.'

'Well, you know, Mr. Churchtower, we think Germany *did* want war with England. Before the war a German band used to come here once a week. They used to tell us boys quite openly that one day they would come as German soldiers, and I expect they all went back with precise information about landing places and battery positions and so on.'

'Ach, they were joking.'

'I don't know so much. Why did you come to England, Mr. Churchtower?'

'*Ach*, I was very young, isn't it? I wanted to get on, and here one can earn. I did not like the conscription and I did not like the subordination. But I do not agree with the way England now treats Germany. It is unheard of.'

'What, particularly?'

'For instance, look at the inflation. I have lost two thousand pounds through the inflation, all my savings.'

'Did you keep it in Germany?' (To himself, Mark added, 'If you live and work here, and are naturalized, why didn't you keep it here.')

'Yes, and all is lost. Thirty years I worked for it, and it is going in a few days. That is what England is doing to Germany. But what England is doing is always right. As you say, my country, wrong or right.'

'I think the quotation is, my country, right or wrong, but I don't think *we* say so. I've never heard anybody say it. The quotation happens to be American, Mr. Churchtower, not English.'

Mark gradually deduced that Mr. Churchtower might have come to England in the 'nineties hoping that he would end his days in an island incorporated in the German Empire, and that the disappointment left him feeling badly used.

The Churchtowers adored Patricia, who continually climbed the stairs to visit Mrs. Churchtower, being received with excited shrieks of '*Ach, guten Tag, mein suesses Engelchen*': and she picked up scraps of German from them. One Christmas morning she announced that she had learned a carol, and, standing sturdily in front of their becardled little tree, sang:

'Stille Nacht,
Heilige Nacht . . .'

Mark was entranced but Sally was cross.

'How dare she teach Patricia to sing German?'

'Oh, it can't do much harm, Sally. It's a lovely hymn, anyway.'

'Then let her sing it in English.'

Sally distrusted foreigners and knew they were dirty (how often had Mark compared her dingy house, hastily 'tidied', with

Jeanne's speckless kitchen?) She knew, also, that they were disgustingly depraved in matters of sex.

'Aren't you a bit sweeping in your opinions about foreigners, Sally? We're foreigners to them.'

'Well, I know, but still . . .'

Mark's plans for Patricia, at five, promised fair, for she blossomed in many ways, loved and was loved by everybody, and gave signs of a quick intelligence that set Mark thinking of scholarships and Oxford. She could swim exceptionally well, though she could not induce Roger to put a toe in the water, and he would drag back, yelling, when she tried to pull him after her.

At week-ends, in the summer, Mark took these two down to the beach. The trippers now came again to Brighton in such throngs that the townspeople could hardly move. It was an ugly time. The women wore their waists round their knees, or nearly. The men laid aside their hats and ties, stretched themselves on the painful beach, and within twenty-four hours developed lobster-red faces, so that, when they returned to The Office, Miss Pencil, the boss's secretary, might say 'Aren't you *brown*, Mr. Humdrum! You *do* look well!' Like peasoup given human form, they oozed turgidly about. They lay snoring on the pebbles. They tucked up trouser-ends above skinny shanks and 'paddled'. They drifted across the Front in great masses when They opened.

This was the peace, the new world they had fought for. Beautiful they were not; none but Hogarth, and he was dead, could have shown in its herdlike ugliness the scene on Brighton beach in those years. These men and women reared another generation for another slaughter. They had inherited the right to education from progenitors who fought hard for it; most of them, therefore, could read and write, but they knew less than their ancestors. They were snobs about being stupid and, although they had a rough good humour in all else, showed a spiteful hatred of good manners, knowledge or intellect; yet they were incredibly servile towards money. They despised ignorant savages who could be tricked into trading golden bangles or ivory tusks for glass beads, and only wished they could get near a tribe of them with a cargo of gimcracks; but the articles for which they themselves traded their hard-earned wages, in the tawdry shops of Suburbia were so hideous that even the wax flowers and the antimacassars

of Victoria's century presently rose, by comparison with them, to high peaks of taste.

They were indeed the sons and daughters of Merrie England, in the nineteen-twenties, and Mark and his Patricia loved them. These were their people and they looked forward all the week to their afternoons on the beach, and to their tea with Granny Yeoman afterwards. And on one such Saturday Mark and Patricia (Roger, more fretful than usual, had run indoors to Sally) turned in at the little garden gate and no Nelly Yeoman was at the window, eagerly watching. They opened the unlocked door and went in.

She lay in bed, in her dark room, and Mark saw that she was very ill. Appledore was not yet home: inevitably, on such a day, the Woman's Arms held him overlong.

'There you are, dears,' she said gaily, as Patricia ran to her bedside and began to tell her all about their afternoon, 'I'm so glad you've come. Mark, dear, I think perhaps I'd better see the doctor.'

'What is it, mother?'

'Oh, nothing very much, I expect, dear. You know those pains I get. Let's have tea first. I got up just now and put the kettle on. There are some of those raspberry tartlets, the ones Patricia likes, from the corner shop. Patricia, stay and talk to me, dear, while daddy makes tea.'

'Are you ill, granny?'

'Yes, just a little, Patricia.'

'I've been ill, granny.'

'I know, dear, when you had measles. . . .'

Mark heard their voices, as he made tea. Crumpets, hot and buttered, kept warm in the oven. Patricia's tartlets were laid out on a dish. In the bedroom Patricia chattered and his mother laughed with her.

Nelly Yeoman was flushed, and her eyes were very bright. She laboured in her breathing, and he saw she was in great pain. But she smiled and kept Patricia prattling until all the tarts were gone. In Patricia's memory, when she grew older, this deathbed scene would look no different from any other of her parties with Granny Yeoman.

Mark was distraught and as soon as he could took Patricia home,

left a message for the doctor (who was out), and hurried back. He thought his mother was asleep when he tiptoed in. Her eyes were closed, he sat down quietly by her bed. There was no sound but that of her heavy breathing. The house grew dark, and, unwilling to wake her, he turned on only the light in the passage outside, which threw a dim, reflected glow into the room.

'Mark, dear.'

'Yes, mother.'

'You know where my insurance book is. Your father doesn't know of it. I want you to take care of it and look after things. There will be enough for everything.'

'Don't talk like this, mummy dear. The doctor will be here soon.'

She was silent for a long time, save for her painful breathing, and then she spoke again.

'Don't be late home, Pat. I get so worried, I always think something has happened. He was *such* a lovely baby, and so much admired. He's in Australia. I wish he could marry some nice girl. I do hope he won't let Sally make a fool of him. She's a common little thing, and cunning as a monkey, and always running about with men. . . .'

Mark pressed her hand gently. She opened her eyes suddenly and asked sharply, 'Who's that?'

'It's Mark, mother.'

'Oh, my dear, I'm sorry, I've been asleep. I just dropped off. Why are you sitting there in the dark?' She was lucid again, and Mark had seldom seen her so happy. 'How my little darling enjoyed those tarts, Mark. Bless her sweet heart. She's the loveliest thing I've ever seen. How I shall miss her.'

'Mummy!'

'Oh, my time has come, Mark dear. That's nothing to worry about. I have always been ready. God will look after me, and I shall pray for you all. Take great care of Patricia, my dear.'

Mark saw that his mother had no fear, no doubts. She did not repine or look back, but looked hopefully forward. She ignored her pain, and, watching her gaiety, he thought how she would have graced a happy and carefree home. All her life she had an unquestioning faith in a God who, no matter how the world behaved, lovingly watched over Nelly Yeoman. He

saw now that, as her mortal end approached, this belief was firm.

She was unconscious again when the doctor came. He beckoned Mark outside.

'I'll call again later this evening, but there's really nothing I can do. As you know, she should have had an operation years ago.'

'Would one save her now?'

'I'm afraid not. There is, perhaps, a chance in a million, if we could get her to hospital in time. But I don't think I ought to advise you to do that. Your mother is a very gentle old lady, Mr. Yeoman, but she has been a most stubborn woman in this matter. . . .'

'Is that you, doctor?' It was Nelly Yeoman's voice. When they went in she was sitting up, smiling happily and looking oddly young, in spite of her disordered grey hair, bright red face, glittering eyes, and the contorted features of pain.

'Mrs. Yeoman, you know you shouldn't be sitting up.'

'I'm going to be disobedient, doctor. I'm going to sit up as long as I like. I feel very well. I only want to tell you not to let anybody talk you into operating on me. I won't have it.'

'Well, Mrs. Yeoman, you've always said that. Nobody can force you to submit to an operation.'

'No, and I'm going to have my own way in this.'

When he was gone she became unconscious again. Mark heard Appledore come up the garden path. He met his father at the door and sobered him with the news. They both sat down by her bedside. After a little while she began calling for 'Pip' and talking about her wedding and laughing.

' . . . Oh, Pip, you are terrible. You shouldn't drink so much champagne, it goes to your head. I don't mind, I love you, but you are so rude to people, and it makes me unhappy for you. Poor old Mrs. Dorking had such an expensive new hat on, all covered with fruit and flowers, and you pretended you thought it was a vegetable salad and asked the waiter to bring you oil and vinegar, so that you could mix the dressing. And then, when you saw that I was nervous and ashamed, you were rude to me before all those people, at our wedding breakfast. And it could have been so happy. I was so giggly . . .'

Appeldore's mouth suddenly puckered up, like a slapped child's, and he put his hands over his face, so that the bristly moustache stuck out on either side, and tears trickled through his fingers.

'My God, isn't it awful,' he said.

All through the night they stayed there and Appledore listened to the tally of his life, told in Nelly Yeoman's delirious voice. His sins, perhaps, were not great, but they were mean, and had been visited on all save himself; he had always found a way, from day to day, from glass to glass, to escape the deeper suffering of life and had never loved any but Appledore Yeoman. A sorry picture of a man Nelly Yeoman lovingly drew, whose soul already wandered in some cloudy region far from the twitten. Her voice gently chid him not to Go Out To-Night, and spoke sadly of A Certain Lady (who awaited him, not far away, that very evening). She talked to Pat, and her darling Patricia, and to Mark, but came always back to Pip, and to his drinking, and to peccadilloes of which Mark had never heard, and to their early days together. In this eerie play her Pip's was the chief part. She made him no reproaches, in her delirium, but showed only a loving anxiety; and this, if he was capable of feeling, must have been doubly bitter for him to hear. He sat all night, with grimly clamped lips, and listened, and never looked at Mark: not even when Nelly began to sing.

For Appledore and Nelly had been married, long ago, at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and Appledore sometimes joined with Nelly in making fun of their poverty (instead of tormenting her with whining complaints about it) by singing his own parody of a well-known music-hall song.

Now, Nelly Yeoman, rambling in the shadows, said 'You did tease me, Pip, didn't you?' and sang that parody:

'At St. Margaret's Church I met my doom
And now we live in the top back room.
She told me she was five-and-twenty,
Cash in the bank she had in plenty . . .'

Then Appledore covered his eyes with his hand for a moment.

Sally looked in, frightened and tearful, and ran away; she 'couldn't bear it'. The doctor came, murmured to Appledore,

and went. Still Nelly talked to Pip; and Pip, in that dim and shabby little room, where the big brass knobs of the old bedstead faintly gleamed, watched the poor pageant of his years pass before him.

Nelly never saw her Pip again. She opened her eyes once, but perceived nothing with them. Soon after dawn she died.

Thus Nelly Yeoman left the twitten, and her little window on the world, and Mark and Patricia. She lost, in dying, the secret battle she had fought, the one she had thought certainly to win, to her great consolation. For Appledore knew about the insurance book, found it, and promptly held Mr. Willy to ransom.

She was buried in the churchyard on the hill, that looks down on the sea; the little churchyard that once dominated the quiet village of Brighthelmstone, and now was lost and submerged in the mass and maze of Brighton. Patricia held Mark's hand and watched with wide and wondering eyes as the box that contained the mortal Nelly Yeoman was lowered into the ground and the handful of earth strewn on it; she did not wince or cry, but looked up at Mark with a questioning incomprehension that racked his heart.

At the funeral Appledore was in that state which the police define as not drunk, but having drink taken.

CHAPTER 17

IN 1927 Mark's plans for Patricia promised very well. She was seven, well-grown, and of a quick intelligence and, at last, he was able seriously to think about choosing a good school for her, for he owned his furniture, owed not any man, and had a little money in the bank. But he was very tired and thin from the years of double labour, and was forced by this to take a holiday, the first of his life.

Patricia looked out on a vastly different world from the alley where he himself had been bred. Though mankind perceived less clearly than ever before where it wanted to go, it strove, as if the devil had been behind it, to get there quickly. The entire world exulted when Lindbergh, whom it would presently execrate, flew the Atlantic, although it had been obvious since the first

aeroplane flew that somebody would eventually fly, not merely across an ocean, but round the planet. Human beings who before long would rush in terror to a cellar, when they heard an engine in the sky, now turned their faces upward with infantile beatitude if they might only see an aeroplane flying quicker than any had flown before.

These were the mid-nineteen-twenties, when Sally shingled her hair and discarded her crystal set for a 'loud-speaker' which usually, from exhaustion of its battery, refused to speak at all. When it did utter some sound this was made incomprehensible by an implacable foe, called by Mark Atmos P. Herricks, who broke in with shrieks and wails. Sally now smoked many cigarettes, which stayed in her mouth when she spoke or worked, so that she grew rings round her eyes, from screwing them up; and she was ardently devoted to Edgar Wallace. Mark, reflecting on the passionless being which was the living Sally, conjectured that this literature of murder, in some inexplicable way, must serve as a sex substitute.

'Isn't he *clever*, Mark? I can't think how he does it. He writes a novel in a few days, and they're so *good*.'

Thus Mark, when he looked back on the nineteen-twenties, saw a picture dominated by Patricia, and a confused background made up of The Pickers, the Loud Speaker, cigarettes and Edgar Wallace; the twitten, from which Appledore was gone to a boarding house not far away; and Brighton, once an Imperial City, from which the British Empire was often ruled between Trafalgar and Waterloo, now a seaside suburb of London.

With tremendous excitement he looked forward to his first holiday. He knew of a cheap little hotel in the New Forest, and Mr. Saffron had agreed to let him use Captain Kettle, the ancient car, for the journey.

Seen through the ardent eyes of his Patricia, to whom all life was a joyful journey, reluctantly interrupted each evening, Captain Kettle was lovelier than any fairytale coach. The body was, perhaps, not quite as high above sea-level as Mont Blanc, but was far from the ground. In bad weather, only the hood stood between the passengers and death from exposure, but even this fate they avoided at the risk of pneumonia, for when the canvas canopy was over them, bellying like the sails of a frigate in a

gale, icy winds converged on them and the noise was deafening. The erection of the hood was a labour akin to that of pitching a tent, and, once fixed, it formed a parachute-like wind-trap of great ingenuity, so that when high winds blew Mark's only doubt was whether it would take Captain Kettle and themselves with it when it finally sailed away, or break loose and leave them behind.

No townsman of Brighton, who was in the neighbourhood, could have failed to notice when the Yeomans drove off on their first holiday. They bowled along at a good twenty-five miles an hour, with a full head of steam under the bonnet and clouds of it bursting from the radiator; hood and wind joined forces to shriek the rival merits of sail; the engine made a noise like large stones being shaken in a box; a long trail of blue smoke lay behind. And Patricia, standing beside Mark in front while the whimpering Roger had to be plugged with sweets in the back, sang in an oddly deep and resounding voice:

‘Here come the Yeomanree,
Here come the Yeomanree. . . .’

so that people looked round, startled, and then smiled as they saw Patricia's laughing face and golden curls.

What bliss was that ride, for them all! The sun shone and the sea sparkled, green were the Downs and lovely the villages. For the first time they were free and on pleasure bound, all together. Belatedly, but with truth, Mark told himself, ‘This was worth fighting for’. Captain Kettle put his best plug foremost and touched forty miles an hour. They drove up to an inn at Chichester, to Sally's delight, for lunch.

The happiest fourteen days of these people's lives followed, and some celestial recorder, looking down on them, might have remarked, with surprised air, ‘Hm, they really are a devoted little family, after all’ and have scratched out some entries in his ledger and made new ones. The tiny hotel, set back from the road that ran to Southampton, was framed in the trees of the New Forest. Two ladies owned it who in 1914 might have expected to find husbands, or husbands to find them, but now would be always alone. Their guests were all ladies of their own plight and age, or elderly married couples; husbandless or childless people who doted on Patricia.

Sally recaptured the delight of her brief reign as an officer's wife. In a lounge a trim maid served tea; in a small dining-room stood neat tables with flowers; on a lawn were basket chairs where you sat, watched motor-cars pass, and read Edgar Wallace. She chatted with the other ladies, showed off her best dresses, revelled in the prestige due to the only mother there — and Patricia's mother at that. The respect she met brought out the best in her. Mark had never thought so highly of Sally and was pleased by her success, and she responded to his warmth.

But his joy was in Patricia. For the first time, whole days were his, to roam and play with her. They wandered about the Forest. They saw wild ponies, and Patricia ran to try and stroke them, while Roger clung to Mark's side. They found violets and primroses growing, and they paddled in woodland streams. With Captain Kettle, they went to Southampton, and he showed her great steamers, white and gold; to Bournemouth, where they bathed in the sea; to the Isle of Wight, and the Needles (and he hired a rowing-boat and pulled out to the lighthouse, so that Patricia might hand up a bundle of magazines to the lonely keepers of the light).

When he laid her down at night she said, 'I do love you, daddy'. When he crept in to look at her his heart was filled with happiness, and yet with a pain for which he could not account, as he looked down at her fair head, dim in the darkness. His joy in Patricia, and his thankfulness for her, were so great that the bitter jealousy he had long felt, about Pat and Sally, and the self-reproach which had long mortified him, alike were stilled. These things, he thought as he looked down at Patricia, did not matter any longer. All that mattered was Patricia and the future, and his heart was warm towards Sally for giving him this lovely daughter.

At the end of fourteen days the Yeomanry took Captain Kettle and steamed away, followed by the waving handkerchiefs of all the ageing maiden ladies and childless couples. Patricia, brown from her holiday, sang 'Here come the Yeomanry'. Near Havant, Mark steered Captain Kettle round a bend and, a couple of yards away, saw coming towards him the headlights and shining radiator of a big car, travelling fast on the wrong side of the road. . . .

The memory of this moment would awaken him in the night, in distant lands, after many years, and leave him shaking and

sweat-drenched in his bed. He thought he had experienced, in a falling aeroplane with his dead brother at the controls, as much anguish as one man could endure. Now he learned how much bitterness one moment can contain.

In that instant, brief as the tick of the clock, before the crash came, one thought filled his heart and head until they seemed to burst:

‘Patricia!’

CHAPTER 18

NEARLY six months passed before Mark Yeoman returned to the twitten, and when he came, with a deep scar running down his cheek, chrysanthemums bloomed in the little gardens, where tulips had been when Captain Kettle and the Yeomans drove away, and the leaves were turning yellow on the trees.

From an upper window of his little house Mrs. Churchtower greeted him with the air of respectful gloom due to a bereaved father and husband. His rooms were spotlessly clean, for Mrs. Sud had kept them so, and now she opened the door, as she saw him hobble up the path, and welcomed him with the cup of tea which is the inarticulate tribute of her kind. They drank it in the kitchen, and then began to go through the rooms together, choosing pieces of furniture for the two rooms which Mark meant to keep for himself.

‘I hope you’ll be all right again soon, sir,’ said Mrs. Sud, sniffing (she never would stop calling Mark ‘Sir’, and this had always annoyed Sally), ‘you ’ave bin through a lot!’

‘Oh, I’ll be fit again soon now,’ said Mark, ‘the doctors think I’ll be walking without a limp in another week or two.’

They came to Patricia’s little room. A heavy bar of sunlight lay across the empty cot, and there was, for Mark, an eerie feeling in the place. Roger’s room held no living memories; but then, Roger had never been more than a name to him. It was the same with Sally; he did not hear the echo of her voice in this place, calling ‘Mark’. But Patricia! Patricia was everywhere, shaking the bars of her cot in the morning, calling ‘Daddah!’ as soon as she heard him stir, jumping up and down with glee when he went to her. . . .

He went into his own room and Sally's, while Mrs. Sud pushed things about in Roger's room. Absent-mindedly he went to the big mahogany chest-of-drawers which he had bought cheaply in The Lanes. The top three drawers were Sally's, the lower two his. He had always liked this stout chest, and thought he would keep it; it would hold practically everything he owned.

'I think I'll keep the chest, Mrs. Sud,' he called, 'I can just get it in my bedroom.'

'Yes, it's a good strong piece, that, sir,' she called back, 'they don't make furniture like that nowadays.'

'I'll turn Sally's things out, Mrs. Sud,' he said, 'and perhaps you can look through them.'

He went through the upper drawers. Sally's stockings and underclothes and jumpers, untidily folded, lay jumbled up together; the contrast between her drawers and his own, where his shirts and socks lay in neat order, was one of the differences between Sally and himself.

'What will you do with Sally's things, Mrs. Sud?' he called casually.

'Oh, I might be able to use some of them myself. . . .'

He was taking out stockings and blouses, folding them tidily and putting them on the bed. . . .

' . . . and if there's anything I can't use plenty of others will be glad of it. I don't hold with waste, these times. . . .'

Underneath some crumpled slips and camiknicks at the back of the middle drawer he found a small red box, a thing covered in imitation leather. He had never seen it before. It had a little lock, but was not locked: Sally, he thought affectionately, never could keep a key.

Mrs. Sud bustled about next door, and in the twitten outside he heard the noises of children playing. He opened the red box. There were photographs in it, fading snapshots; one of Pat in uniform, two or three of young men he did not know, others of Sally, of Mr. and Mrs. Sud, of women and girls and babies. There were odd little souvenirs, the sort of thing the Sallies of this world keep: bits of heather, little silver horseshoes, a champagne cork, a wedding card, picture postcards.

'I've found some of Sally's treasures, Mrs. Sud,' he called.

She came to the door, looked over his shoulder, wiped her eye

with a corner of her apron, said, 'She was always a one for keeping her bits and pieces,' and bustled back to her dusting.

As she went Mark lifted the postcards and saw underneath them letters. There were some from Patrick, and the old fierce jealousy revived as he ran his eye over them.

At the bottom was another letter. If that thin paper packet had not been there Mark Yeoman's life would have been different. It was addressed, by typewriter, to Miss Sally Sud, and on the flap was the printed name of a firm of Brighton solicitors. He read it.

It said that Miss Sud had no claim on their client, Mr. Harold Piecegood, and if she did not cease from importuning him they would take legal action against her on his behalf. He looked at the date. It had been written about a week before she came to see him in hospital and told him that Patrick had made her pregnant.

'Don't you bother about folding her clothes, Mr. Mark,' called Mrs. Sud from next door, 'she was always an untidy one, was Miss Sally.'

He stood in the room where he had lain with Miss Sally, and looked at the letter. He would have given anything to be able to do to Sally, with his own hands, what the splintered glass of Captain Kettle's windscreen had done. Nine wasted years — a wasted life. Then he remembered something. Sally had been Patricia's mother, and he could not regret Patricia. Misery filled him at the thought of Patricia's young body, all torn and smashed.

He read the letter again, still hardly able to believe his eyes. For some reason, he had never been able to suspect perfidy in others. Mrs. Sud, next door, sang 'Horsey, keep your tail up, keep the dust out of my eyes'. She was a cheerful soul, and an inveterate hummer; and the black dress she now wore could not break her of the habit of song.

Then, as he stood in the empty room, his anger turned against himself. How could he blame any others for abusing his trustfulness, if he chose to be so idiotically trustful? A sense of shame and inferiority came over him. He felt that eyes watched him in the empty room.

'Mrs. Sud,' he called.

'Yes, Mr. Mark.' She reappeared at the door, hands on aproned waistline.

'Mrs. Sud, I've changed my mind. I won't keep anything at all. I'll tell Mr. Saffron to make me a round offer for everything in the place. Seeing these rooms, and everything in them, has made me realize that I couldn't come back here. I'm going to sell everything and go abroad. You'd better have these things of Sally's.'

He handed her the red box. In his pocket he crumpled up the solicitor's letter. Mrs. Sud looked at him round-eyed.

'Well, I must say I wondered whether you'd want to live here again, when it came to the point, Mr. Mark,' she said, 'I know how much your Patricia meant to you.'

'Yes, Mrs. Sud,' he said, 'that's it. I don't feel I can face it. I'll just keep Patricia's pictures, that's all I want. . . .'

CHAPTER 19

IN 1928 an Englishman sat beneath a striped awning on a terrace in the Place Lamartine at Arles, sipped vermouth cassis, and talked to an Englishwoman who was nearer thirty than twenty. He did not know her; she had seen him reading the *Paris Daily Mail* and had been seized forthwith with the childish wonder which afflicts untravelled English people abroad when they meet a compatriot. This, and the fact that she was in France, where she believed convention to be much more lax in such things, had emboldened her to speak to him.

'But I suppose you will go back to England one day,' she said.

'If the choice is mine,' he said, 'never.'

'Never? How very strange.'

'Why strange? Are you one of those people who think others strange if they do not do that which you do?'

Mark Yeoman wore the last of his khaki shirts from the far-off, nearly forgotten war, open at the neck, trousers with a leather belt pulled in to the uttermost hole and still slack round the waist, and a battered old hat. He was lean and fit. This woman was the first, apart from innkeepers and shopkeepers, with whom he

had talked for a long time. For nearly a year he had been tramping through France, trying to put a long distance between himself and his memories: memories of an unhappy home and childhood, a treacherous wife, wasted years — and Patricia. He was an embittered man and thought himself a very hard one. It would need a very clever woman, he thought, to ensnare Mark Yeoman. He treated women, if he ever had occasion to speak to one, with a slashing incivility which, to his annoyance, seemed to please them.

‘But what do you *do*, Mr. . . .’

‘My name is my own, madame, and as to what I do, why, if it means anything to you, I follow my nose and look straight ahead of me.’

‘It sounds most intriguing. But don’t you ever look at what is sitting beside you?’

That disarmed him, and he grinned. She saw her advantage, and said, ‘And don’t you ever fall by the wayside?’

She was trying to start the old game, he saw. ‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t. If I were ever to halt by the wayside there would be some wretched woman there, trying to prevent me from faring on my way.’

‘Have your experiences with women been *so* bad?’

‘They could not have been worse. I detest their possessiveness.’

‘But *I* do not want to possess you.’

‘And I do not want to possess *you*.’

That struck home. She went very red, this lonely lady who sought a companion for a random hour, she collected her handbag, and her *Times*, and without another word rose and went her way. She walked out of Mark Yeoman’s life, and probably never spoke to a stranger again. He smiled after her and hoped he had hurt her deeply.

He was feeling savage for many reasons. First, because the distaste for women which he tried to feel was becoming very difficult to maintain, here in blazing Provence. Second, because his money was running short, and it would be impossible for him much longer to live, aloof from his kind, as he had lived since that day when he discovered Sally’s red box.

He had lived very cheaply, during that year, in Paris, Marseilles and the French countryside. He had slept in peasants’

houses and the cheapest inns. If it were possible for a man to put regrets behind him, Mark would have done this; but he found that it was not possible, that they accompanied him like unwanted companions, that the further he went the closer they kept to him. The thought of Patricia, particularly, gave him no rest; it made him frantic to think that the woman who had borne him this lovely child was a strumpet; and still, though much time had passed, his fingers would itch to be round his dead Sally's throat.

And the worst of it all was that now, after that year's pilgrimage, his blood called clamantly for a woman. Sitting here in Arles, Mark was moved by such unrest that he wondered whether he was going mad. The blazing sky, and its almost intolerable blue, reminded him of the Somme, of 1916, and of Jeanne. There was a seething unease in this stifling stillness, torment in the fierce lemon-yellow of the sun, the vivid red earth, the lurid flowers, the harsh outline of the mountains, the glistening air. His body winced and his spirit protested against the heat; but against his will it quickened his pulses. He began to comprehend the difference which climate makes, in Latins and Anglo-Saxons.

He thought a lot, in those days, about Vincent Van Gogh, who, crazed by starvation and illness, worked in Arles, tried to murder Paul Gauguin, and cut off his own ear. Mark himself so keenly felt the scourge of the grilling heat, the Provençal sun and the Provençal mistral, that he could understand the racked spirit of a man of such genius, cast without food or friends into this little place, called mad by the street urchins and plundered by landlords; this man for whose pictures now, only forty years after his suicide, when he might still have lived and laboured, the greatest art galleries of the world contested.

Mark Yeoman was himself afire with insistent, prickling impulses and discontents; he saw vividly into the mind of a man with eyes reddened and scalp burnt sore by sun and wind, who walked these streets, in paint-splashed, shabby clothes, unsaleable pictures under his arms, hunger in his stomach, disease in his veins, despair in his heart, death in his brain. He loathed the smug shopkeepers, some of whom had petitioned for the living Van Gogh's removal to a lunatic asylum, and who now displayed cheap reproductions of his paintings.

Forty years after Van Gogh's tragedy, in fact, another tormented soul came to Arles, was scourged by natural human impulses and thought himself pursued by demons, looked in the mirror and asked himself, 'Am I going mad?' and wandered about the scorched streets, in search of peace.

From loneliness, bitter thoughts, heat and the mistral, Mark Yeoman came near to losing his reason in Arles. He could see no reason to live, no reason why he had lived. But he saw that only one thing could save him: to keep moving. He must get away from Provence, find a white road between shady orchards, with a stream beside it.

And with this vision, came one of Jeanne. He had not seen her for twelve years, or seriously thought of seeking her out for eight; but now, with this new, clamant unquiet in his blood, that space of time was wiped out, and he thought that, if he could only find her, they could begin again where they had left off in October of 1916. There was a physical explanation for this. Mark had only known three women: the girl in the Avenue Wagram, who did not count; Sally, who was frigid and a hundred years later would have been classed by medical men among the causes of neurasthenia or sterility in males; and Jeanne! Jeanne! The picture of Jeanne now painted itself, in Mark's imagination, in vivid, warm and exciting hues.

The pitiless sun and wind of Provence did their work. Mark set out in search of Jeanne! With a bounding and impatient heart he took the northward road, and presently came to a countryside which he did not recognize, but knew from the names of villages where he had been quartered, or had crouched in a trench. The traces of war's ruination were now almost imperceptible. Peasant, builder and mother nature had repaired that vast destruction.

At last, one day, as the sun was setting, Mark came to Amiens. Looking about him, from the station, he saw a sign, 'Le Moulin d'Or'. He had forgotten the inn. Now his mind's eye saw a July day in 1916, a group of laughing young airmen gathered round Captain Patrick Yeoman as they waited for Second-Lieutenant Mark Yeoman, and a smiling girl watching them. What was her name? He had forgotten.

Travel-stained, so that the reception clerk looked at him

curiously, he booked a room and dined at the Moulin d'Or. Around him prosperous Frenchpeople gave grave attention to their food, but Mark saw other guests: youngsters in Flying Corps uniform, Canadians with maple leaf badges, Australians and New Zealanders in their enviable hats, men of every English county, kilted Scotsmen, Welshmen with the black flash, Irish riflemen, all the rip-roaring, roistering company of his youth. And among them, Patrick, laughing, ardent, fearless, making love to — what *was* that girl's name. . . .'

'Monsieur.'

Paying his bill, he looked up and saw that plump Madame in her pen near the door was that girl. Madeleine, that was it, Madeleine!

'Monsieur, are you not Lieutenant Yeoman?'

'Yes. You remember me?'

'But yes. Monsieur, will you come with me an instant? Gaston!' The head waiter took her place at the seat of custom and she led Mark to an office. '*Tiens*, but it is strange. I was watching you, monsieur. You are surprised that I remember you? Look!'

From a drawer she took a photograph of Patrick and himself. The same picture had hung over Nelly Yeoman's deathbed. On it Patrick had written, 'Madeleine, je reviendrai toujours'. It was uncanny to think that something of Pat had lain here, all these years.

'Ah, now I understand that you recognized me. You know that my brother was killed, Mademoiselle Madeleine?'

'Ah, yes, I knew when the aviators came that evening and he was not with them. You had great fortune, that you were not killed, monsieur. You were gravely injured. Your face!'

'No, that was an automobile accident. Then, you loved my brother, Madeleine?'

'Love? Yes, I think so. I do not know. Love is a plant that grows, and this had no time to grow. He was not to resist. He was a pretty boy, so gay, so young. He knew how to captivate a woman. But I had another reason.' Silently she handed him another photograph.

Between taking it and giving it back to her a pageant of his mistakes passed before him, mocking and gibing. He wondered why he, on whom life delighted to play such malicious tricks, had

survived, while Patrick, who had so blithely thwarted them, was killed. He looked at it a long while, thinking of Sally and Roger, then at her.

'And you have never married, Madeleine?'

She looked surprised. 'But *si, si*, of course. I am Madame Legros. My husband is a good and understanding man. He loves Pierre like his own children.'

'Ah, he is called Pierre. And you have others?'

'Yes, two girls. My husband is a man, civilized, *n'est-ce-pas?* He regrets only that it was not his fortune to meet me first, to be the father of Pierre. He would wish to meet you, monsieur . . . how are you called? Ah yes, Mark. But he is in Paris and you stay only to-night?'

'Yes, I must be on my way to-morrow. May I have this photograph?' Mark put it carefully in his pocket-book. 'And may I see Pierre?'

'Yes, come.'

They went upstairs, and she softly opened a door. In this dark room Mark lived the bitterest moments of his life. The ironic confrontation with his mistakes left him with a crushing sense of his own stupidity, almost of uncleanness. The boy with Patrick's face and Patrick's thick and tumbled hair lay deeply asleep. Mark saw a resemblance to his own Patricia, too, and thought how often he had stood, like this, beside Patricia's cot. Madeleine bent and gently kissed her son, who did not stir. She looked expectantly at Mark. He thrust aside the bitter thought of wasted years, leaned down, and kissed his brother's memory.

Downstairs they talked and, for the first time, Mark told someone about Jeanne. Madeleine showed warm sympathy. 'See, monsieur Mark,' she said, 'my man has a car. Will you not wait until he returns, and we will all go together, and see if we can find this little Jeanne? But I have fear. There was a great confusion, in those days, and it is difficult, now, to recognize some of those places.'

'No, Madeleine, thanks, I think I'll go alone.'

Early next morning, carrying only a knapsack, Mark Yeoman marched through the valley of the Somme towards the rising sun. The road which so long knew the hooves and wheels of British

armies, moving towards the senseless carnage, lay white and empty before him, between poplars. He set out exultantly, confident that twelve years would be wiped out, that he would renew, as if he had interrupted it only to fly over the trenches, the ardour of yesteryear. He felt the warmth of the riverbank in his back, and the pressure of Jeanne's lips; he saw himself working in her fields and sitting in her kitchen. But as he covered the miles his heart grew cold, his quest appeared foolish, doubts nagged him. Jeanne would be gone, Jeanne would be married, Jeanne would be different, or indifferent. He began to feel ridiculous.

About noon he came to Beauville, a new village, red and ugly, unrecognizable. Two miles further on he found, beside the river, some tree-stumps, decaying witnesses to the shellfire of 1918, and in one he thought he knew the very tree near which he had lain when he first saw her face reflected in the water, looking into his. But there was no farm: only a new one half a mile away. A surly peasant in blue blouse and clogs was raking muck with a fork in the courtyard. While Mark spoke to him his wife appeared in the doorway and stood leaning against the lintel. They looked suspicious and behaved with hostility.

'The old farm? I don't know anything about the old farm. This is my farm.'

'Could you not tell me where the people are who used to live here?'

'What does he want?' called the woman.

'Wants to know about some people who used to live at the old farm.'

'Tell him we know nothing about them.'

'We know nothing.'

Instead of reunion with Jeanne, this rebuff. Bread and a stone! Cursing, Mark went back to Beauville, to the Mairie. The officials were wooden-faced and indifferent, until he produced coins, when they were suddenly helpful. 'Come, monsieur, if you please,' they said, '*par ici*. This way,' and they led him to a brisk, portly man with a neat beard and red riband: The Mayor.

The Mayor might have been sending dukes to the guillotine, from the pomp he showed, while he kept Mark waiting, in signing

a hawker's licence. He listened with judicial frown while Mark stated his want.

'And what was the name of this farm, monsieur?'

'I don't know.'

'What was the name of the owner?'

'Unfortunately I don't know that either?'

The Mayor shrugged his shoulders until they nearly reached his ears, and spread his arms in the attitude of crucifixion:

'But, monsieur, you ask me to find the nameless owner of a nameless farm which has disappeared from the earth! That, it is a little much!'

Mark was suddenly sick of him, of Beauville, of bumbledom. He rose brusquely.

'Pardon, monsieur le Maire, I see you do not wish to help me. You make the matter appear more difficult than it is. Doubtless you have records which show the farm and the name of its owner. I have come a long way and thought you might be willing to aid a British officer who fought in these parts to find an old friend. I wish you good day.'

The Alliance, child of the Peacemaker's 'cordial understanding', nearly fell. Then the Mayor sprang up, waving Mark to his chair.

'But, monsieur, I pray you, softly, softly. Seat yourself. I, too, am an *ancien combattant*. . . .'

Mark pretended to hesitate and sat down.

'... we who fought side by side in war, we who march in eternal friendship in peace . . .'

'Brotherhood, monsieur le Maire, not friendship; the brotherhood of sacrifice!'

'Brotherhood, my dear monsieur, a brotherhood sealed in blood. The glorious dead. Verdun. . . .'

'The Somme. . . .'

'Our noble allies, the English. . . .'

'Our gallant friends, the French. . . .'

The Mayor wiped away a tear. Mark blew his nose.

'And now, my friend, you shall see that France does not forget. I, Antoine Dupetitbouche, Mayor of Beauville, will help you to find your friends. Er, you have no *financial* interest in this farm?'

'No, monsieur le Maire, it is my heart that moves me.'

'How? Ah! Aha! Ha-ha-ha-ha! The daughter! But, my

dear friend, why did you not say this before? Ah, *l'amour*! Now, in fact, it is necessary that we assist you to your happiness. Let us see.' The Mayor rang a bell in the manner of a man resolving the fate of the planet. 'Henri, bring me the maps. Ah, *voici*. Now, dear friend, regard. Here was the aerodrome. . . .'

'Yes, yes, and here, see, is the farm.'

'But yes, you have right.' The bell rang again. 'Henri, send M. Lejardin to me.'

The Maire buzzed happily, in quest of Mark's lost love. Officials panted up the stairs, laden with records of freeholds and land sales; they panted down again in search of others who had known the farm. Such gesticulations, such exclamations of despair and relief! At last the Mayor turned a radiant face, like the beam of a revolving light, on Mark, while his assistants, exhausted but smiling, grouped themselves behind him.

'Then, my dear friend, we have solved the mystery. Your friends were the Widow Veudon and her daughter Jeanne. The husband was killed in 1917. Mme Veudon and Mlle Jeanne left the farm during the German advance in 1918, and the farmhouse was destroyed. Madame Veudon died in Paris, and Mademoiselle Veudon returned in 1919 and sold the land. You see! France has not refused to help you.'

'I thank you from my heart, monsieur le Maire. But one small link still misses from the chain. Where is Mademoiselle Veudon?'

The Mayor's face fell. He turned, and the faces of his officials also fell, as if each of them were a mirror reflecting his own.

'... it is formidable. . . .'

'... that, it is another question. . . .'

'... ah, that!'

'... after twelve years!'

'I regret infinitely, dear friend, but there I cannot help you. There have been many changes here and all trace has been lost of her. You could but advertise. But it is a long time. . . .'

Thus stupidly, like a pricked balloon, Mark's romantic quest ended. The trail vanished in parchment deeds and shrugged shoulders. He left money to pay for the cost of further inquiries (and a long while afterwards, in other lands, a letter from The Mayor reached him, which said that these had produced no result). Now he did the only thing he could: he invited the

Mayor to dinner and listened dutifully to The Mayor's angry words about messieurs the English and messieurs the Boches.

'We other Frenchmen, dear friend, we know the Germans. Beauville has entertained them thrice in less than sixty years. We do not want to see them again. Messieurs the English take a great responsibility in encouraging the Boches to rearm. Soon, your monsieur Ramsay MacDonald will tell us we must take our troops out of the Rhineland. I tell you, dear friend, that will mean another war. While we hold the Rhineland, the Boches will be quiet. When we go, they will get ready for war. You will see! Contemplate this little town, monsieur. It was an old town. Now, it is a new one. Must it be destroyed again, because messieurs the English do not understand the Boches? Ah, messieurs the English commit a crime against France!'

'But you are certainly too pessimistic, monsieur le Maire. There cannot be another war. . . .'

'There *will* be another war, my dear monsieur Yeoman, and France will pay for it. But the blame will be England's. . . .'

Before he went to bed, Mark wrote a letter to Madelcine:

My dear sister,

I could not find Jeanne, or any trace of her. I do not know where my way lies now, but I hope I shall see you again one day. Kiss Pierre for me and for Patrick. Adieu.

Mark.

Then, lying on bulging feather mattresses, he looked into his future and saw a path that vanished in mists. His quest was done: in a pigeonhole of his mind he stored away a dream. He had missed a turning in life and, after much wandering, gone back and tried to find it. Well, he had failed.

He felt fit and still owned a hundred pounds. The next morning he continued on his vagrant way, still trying to forget England and Sally. He left old towns, fresh in the morning light, travelled all day, and came to others, mellow in the sunset. He set his face towards the dawn and wandered until he found that he faced the dusk. He bathed in unsuspected pools, watched the lazy trout and the tireless birds, climbed mountains and went through forests hushed with snow. He learned strange tongues and new ways of life. Friends were plentiful and his pockets big enough

to hold them; and when he parted with one, he joined company with another. The loneliness of cities fell from him, in this invigorating aloneness.

All through a summer, an autumn, a winter and a spring, he marched down the country of the Marne, the Vosges and the Jura. Over the shoulder of a mountain he came into Switzerland, by Lake Geneva; went on, from lake to lake, and travelled Austria, from Innsbruck to Salzburg and Linz; struck back along the Danube to the Neckar and came at last to the Rhine. He slept in peasants' houses and under hedgerows, learned to speak the German of German Switzerland, of Austria, and of the Rhineland; he was exuberantly healthy.

One morning, lying by the Chiemsee, he saw a girl in a green swimming costume, all wet and gleaming from the water, and spoke to her and they swam together and romped about in the water and laughed and enjoyed themselves so much that he tarried a day, two days, a week. To be with her was great joy. He loved it and thought himself lucky, and looked forward to a long and gay companionship, until one day this maiden cried, Stay, and at the thought of captivity fear of her suddenly took the place of friendship and he almost ran from her. He avoided maidens who might cry, Stay, after that, but sometimes could not tear himself quickly away from an old town, and would lose himself for a week among the alleyways of Meersburg or Ulm, Passau or Rothenburg, Zurich or Heidelberg. . . .

After a year, as another summer waxed, he came down the valley of the Rhine to Mainz and Wiesbaden. His hundred pounds were nearly spent. Mark Yeoman needed to find work.

CHAPTER 20

IN Wiesbaden Mark felt like a straggler who, turning a bend in the road, unexpectedly catches up with the column, for, ten years after the war, he suddenly found himself among the British Army again.

He had almost forgotten the war. It had not secured peace or vindicated honour, it had enriched those who did not fight, it had elevated politicians who had derided the fighting men (was

not Mr. Ramsay MacDonald now the darling of the duchesses, and Mr. Herbert Morrison Prime Minister of London?); all these things combined to make such as he feel the victims of a hoax, and the war, for them, an evil memory. Through his long pilgrimage beneath the broad skies of Europe, however, Mark had gained aloofness, and as he came into Wiesbaden, that summer's morning, fit and free, he was every man's friend, no land's man, and loved his fellow-men on both sides of all frontiers.

It was like being pulled back ten years by the coat-tails, to find himself again among bugle calls, and words of command. While Mark had fought for a livelihood and founded and lost a family, these men of Ypres and the Somme had gone on marching, halting, falling-in, falling-out. They followed the one occupation more boring than that of a soldier in wartime: soldiering in peace. They made their packs square with little wooden planks; the folds of their puttees were measured to a quarter-inch; the regimental barber drilled the hairs of their heads. It was an adjutant's and a sergeant-major's dream of bliss.

Mark found them simple fellows, whose inarticulate imperturbability had defeated the efforts of British generals, from the Crimean to the Great War, to lose Britain's battles, including even the last. After ten years in Germany they had a few words of German and three ideas: 'The beer's good here, chum; the Germans are all right, chum, they're more like Us; the French are no good, chum, they're not like Us.' The Germans watched them with sugared hostility.

Through them Mark met Joe Gradeley, once of the Durham Light Infantry, who had stayed on in Germany after his discharge, married his German Emma, and opened a little beershop by the riverside in Mainz. He now became Mark's landlord, for he had behind his shop just such a clean and cheap little room as Mark needed. 'The Boys' filled Joe's place and 'Joe's' was known to every British soldier on the Rhine. They envied Joe, with his cigar (Joe, all his life, had dreamed of presiding, cigar-in-mouth, over a saloon bar), and saw in him the model of a successful man.

'Evening, Joe. I'll have a large blonde, please — beer, I mean, not the other kind.'

'Ee, lad, that's right, stick to t'beer. You wouldn't know what to do wi t'other kind.'

'Blimey, you try me, Joe.'

'Nay, nay, it takes a man for that. They don't make men in t'army nowadays.'

'You was the last one, wasn't you, Joe? Cor, wouldn't I work my ticket if I thought I'd find a billet like you've got here, Joe.'

'Landed in clover, old Joe has.'

'We'd have won the war two years earlier if you'd known what was waiting for you in Mainz, wouldn't we, Joe?'

'When I think how old Joe used to swear they'd never get him out of Blighty again, once the war was over.'

But Joe was beginning, when Mark arrived, to worry about his future.

'It's all right now, while the army's here, Mr. Yeoman, but I'm not so sure about afterwards.'

'Why, what's worrying you, Joe?'

'Well, I like Germany, and I've got a nice little place here, and I don't mind if I never see Stockton again. But there's a catch in it; all my customers come from the British Army. The Germans won't come because of our boys. The boys don't know that; they think the Germans like 'em, the daft lot. What's going to happen when the boys go? Emma thinks we'll be able to work up a nice local connection, but I'm not so sure. They're a foony lot, these Germans. I know 'em pretty well now. Our people are going to get a shock when t'army moves out. If I had my way, t'army *wouldn't* move out. I've got nothing against these Germans, I've married into 'em, but I don't want a new war. I'll be in a bad way here, if that happens.'

'Your Kaffee, Mr. Jomann'; and Emma would sit down with them and ask Mark why did England encourage France to oppress the Germans, and how could England expect the Germans to pay reparations, until Mark felt that he was back with Mr. Churchtower.

One day about Christmastide of that year, when the townspeople were buying fir trees at the street corners of Wiesbaden and the children dragged their parents through the bright Christmas markets, Mark Yeoman and Joe Gradeley watched The Boys depart, The Boys with whom they themselves had both set out so many years before, when they were both boys. Two English expatriates, they saw the Union Jack lowered; then, as

the troops, behind their clashing band, marched out of the square, a storm of whistling broke out around them. A deafening cacaphony, it was the German equivalent of the hiss, an ugly, hate-filled noise. The mask was off. Joe looked at Mark; 'You see what I mean, Mr. Yeoman,' he murmured.

The English newspapers which they read next day reported the 'great send-off' which the Germans had given the British Army; and over English tea-tables, sage heads were approvingly shaken when later news came through of hostile demonstrations against the departing French. ('Oh, these awful French!') Joe Gradeley and Mark Yeoman were spared such illusions. When old President Hindenburg arrived to celebrate the evacuation, they saw that half the male population, of peaceloving German Republicans, suddenly appeared in uniform, old and new. Soon after that was an election, and, all at once, the man Hitler's name was on every lip, Hitler's men were everywhere. Joe Gradeley was glum. The Germans ostentatiously avoided his little place, and Emma advised her Joe to get on good terms with these Nazis.

'I never thought I'd wish myself in Stockton again, Mr. Yeoman. I thought I'd done a clever bit o' work, settling down here. Now I'm thinking I've been a fool.'

'Cheer up, Joe. This will all blow over.'

Mark was too busy to worry about such matters. He was earning a living again. His employers, Aubrey Plantudor and Miss Buncle, in private life man and wife, were both physical giants, but only in this resembled each other. Aubrey Plantudor, who was about fifty, was like a hollow oak; he still looked good but was sapped of energy. Miss Buncle, whose figure was that of a principal boy of the 'nineties, was of enormous vitality, and ruthless as a snake. Given Miss Buncle's qualities, Aubrey would have become an emperor; but so would Miss Buncle, given Aubrey's sex.

These two (in whom Mark suspected a history of unsuccessful actor-management: Aubrey had obviously been born to play the lead in *The Prisoner of Zenda*) had decided, after the Great War, to go into the travel business. They had set up headquarters at Wiesbaden, and when Mark met them Plantudor's Planned Tours were known wherever English is spoken; that is, everywhere save

in English clubs, hotels and railway trains, where nothing is spoken. Their advertisements dazzled; no Alps so white and pointed, no lakes and skies so blue, no tulip-fields so gay, no palaces so rococo as Plantudor's. Plantudor collected you at Clapham and tucked you up in bed at Cologne almost without your noticing it, and your tickets, luggage, meals, tips, bills were all cared for by such *nice* young men (and so cheap, dear; do you know, the whole fortnight cost less than my holiday at Torquay last year!).

Miss Buncle had scored heavily over her older rivals by launching 'Come to Germany' trips before the British public (as these seniors thought) was ready to go. The British public came in masses, and now even Miss Buncle was almost overwhelmed by the rush of business, while Aubrey Plantudor was near to a breakdown from watching her do so much work.

The demeanour of the Plantourists towards the Germans kept Mark amused and amazed. The Indian colonels intimidated by fierce glares that they remembered the shelling of Scarborough; the maiden ladies sought to show, by a kind of cringing condescension, that they forgave all; the little typists, privily excited, cast covert glances of curiosity at the well-built young Rhinelanders. ('You wouldn't think they were such brutes, would you, Mr. Yeoman?')

Aubrey Plantudor received his Plantourists like the Sun King holding court. Nothing could exhaust his charm and urbanity as long as they kept to the generalities of travel; but if they tried to discuss an overcharge, an uncomfortable room, or railway timetables, he would vanish. One moment he was there; the next, he was gone and where he had been was Miss Buncle. The maiden ladies, who had looked forward to nice long talks with Aubrey, would contemplate her with rancour. The Indian colonels, however, would run appreciative eyes over her and twirl their moustaches. Her shape was that of the hourglass, and they knew, from the teaching of their youth, that Miss Buncle (whose waist they could with both hands have spanned easily, and whose bosom scarcely with both arms) was A Fine Woman.

Mark was useful to these two. He knew how to talk to Germans and soon they kept him busy rushing to the rescue of angry colonels, whose brown shoes had not been polished to the standard

of Hyderabad, or of maiden ladies in distress who knew by the chambermaid's look that she was being rude, though they could not understand what she said. True, he could not persuade the colonels to call the proprietors of the Hotels Majestic, Imperial and Rumpelstiltskinerhof, Herr Direktor, instead of You!; and he did not even try to dissuade the maiden ladies, as they grappled with German, from telling the head waiters that they wished to entertain their lovers (when they meant their lady friends) to tea in their private rooms.

But he overcame graver problems. All these people really wanted, he found, was bacon and eggs for breakfast and a thoroughly indigestible afternoon tea. Nothing less and nothing else would convince them that Germany might yet be reclaimed from barbarity. The hotel-keepers regarded both wishes as depraved. Breakfast, to them, meant coffee and rolls. Tea meant rusks, and a little teapot with a rubber necklace to catch the drips, and a strainer fixed into the spout to catch the leaves, if any of that meagre company had the strength to crawl out, and a slice of lemon alongside, in a neat chromium-plated squeezer designed to contain exactly one slice and manufactured by the Reich Lemonsqueezer Company of Limited Liability (or Rilsquaco, for short).

The peace of Europe might have been saved if Mark's talents had been used to promote it, for he won a great victory of pacification over bacon and eggs. The hotel-keepers were deeply averse from beginning God's day with this repulsive dish, but grudgingly produced, when they found they could not avoid it, either a yellow thing, neither omelet nor scrambled eggs, through which little cubes of fat bacon peeped, or a moist fried egg draped round a slice of cold ham. With this in their stomachs the days of Plantudor's guests began ill. Their complaints were so many that Aubrey (withdrawing) and Miss Buncle (emerging) began to look like the figures in a Swiss weather clock.

At this crisis, Mark was called in. He always began his battles by drinking a bottle of wine with the Herr Direktor, the chief of whose many grievances was that Herr Plantudor's clients were seemingly unaware that the Rhineland produced wine.

'Zum Wohl, Herr Direktor.'

'Prosit, Herr Yeoman.'

'Ach, that is a good wine!'

'Ja, ja. That you may well say.'

'A lordly wine!'

'Well, finally, we understand something of wine, we Rhinelanders. I will never understand, Herr Jomann, that your esteemed countrymen do not drink our wine. Tea, mineral water, whisky! One has the impression that they watch always the reckoning, like a man in a taxicab.'

'No, it is not only that, Herr Direktor. They need educating. Now, if you could display over your reception desk a large photograph of an English duchess, drinking a bottle of wine . . . I merely throw out the suggestion. But you disappoint them in the matter of afternoon tea. Now, tea is a religion with them.'

'A religion! Mein Gott!'

'Ah, yes, but *their* god is tea, tea with sugar and much milk. And toast, Herr Direktor.'

'But we give them toast!'

'Ah, no, it must be toasted on *both* sides. And those rusks, Herr Direktor! They don't want rusks, Herr Direktor; they want cakes. *Not* biscuits, which you call cakes.'

'Cakes! Not cakes! What shall one understand?'

'Why, sweet pastries, creamy pastries, beautiful fat, jammy pastries, Herr Direktor. Give them these things and the name of your hotel will ring through England. Deny them these, and they will say, the Germans are not *civilized*, the Germans are not *thorough*, the Germans cannot *organize*.'

'What! Not thorough, not organize? We! I shall show them!'

'I knew you would, Herr Direktor. Zum Wohl! A beautiful wine, that. And now, Herr Direktor, the bacon and eggs. This, even more than afternoon tea, is a matter of religion, and the English are a very religious people.'

'Look you, Herr Jomann. Do the English come here to see our Rhine, its castles, our cities, our wonderlovely countryside, or for bacon and eggs?'

'For bacon and eggs, Herr Direktor. A baconless and eggless Englishman is deaf alike to the music of Wagner and the muse of Goethe, blind to the beauty of nature and even to the culture of Germany. It is a phenomenon which the scientists cannot explain. Show an Englishman a breakfast menu with a hundred

dishes, beginning with pomegranates on caviare, milk and honey, manna and artichokes in aspic, and he will read carefully through ninety-nine items and say, quite seriously, when he comes to the last, 'I *think* I'll have bacon and eggs.'

'But Jesus, Maria and Joseph; Herr Jomann, what will you from me then? They *get* their accursed eggs and bacon!'

'Ah no, Herr Direktor, they do *not*. The whole renown of German guest-friendliness, yes, even of Germany, is at stake.'

'Of German guest-friendliness?'

'Of Germany itself, Herr Direktor!'

'Mein Gott, then we must see what is to do.'

'Yes. I must explain that we are an incorrigibly militarist people.'

'You English? Ja, ja, that I willingly believe. I have always maintained that the English prepared the war. . . .'

'Er, your health, Herr Direktor. A wonderful wine, and as such wines go it has gone. May I order another bottle? I hate to think of the first being lonely in the place where good wines go to, wherever that may be.'

'Ho-ho! That is good. Karl, again a bottle.'

'I was saying, Herr Direktor, we are an inveterately militarist people. All your English guests are colonels, colonels' widows, colonels' daughters, or would have been colonels' wives if the recent unpleasantness between our two countries had not reduced the number of potential colonels. They were all born in a mess.'

'In a *mess*!'

'In an officers' casino, if you will.'

'Ach, so! That is genteel, at least.'

'Is it not? Well — your health, Herr Direktor — as I say, they all have the parade ground in their blood. . . .'

'I wonder, then, that England does not produce better generals.'

'But, Herr Direktor, I beg you! Wellington!'

'Ach, a German victory. Marshal Blücher's victory.'

'Nelson.'

'An admiral, not a general. And he merely beat the French. We Germans never found time to show you how to fight at sea, until our glorious victory at Skagerrak.'

'You mean Jutland.'

'Nein, nein, Skagerrak.'

'Um. Well — permit me to fill your glass, Herr Direktor: your health, a really superb wine — well, as I say, your English guests have this inherited, military respect for order. And they like their bacon and eggs in military order. Bacon to the right, eggs to the left. No socialist mixing of the classes. Two, or preferably three, rashers, drawn up on the right and dressed by the left. One, or better two, eggs, leading the parade in a smart and soldierly fashion. No omelets, whipped eggs, smashed eggs, or messed-about eggs, and no ham. Eggs, Herr Direktor, and bacon, Herr Direktor. Give them that, and they will say that you are their cousins.'

'Must I go to school at my age, on account of their damned eggs and bacon?'

'But think, Herr Direktor, it is for Germany. Order! Thoroughness! Efficiency! Organization! Guest-friendliness. . . .'

A beautiful peace fell on Wiesbaden about this time, and Mark asked Aubrey for a rise. Aubrey showed signs of a nervous crisis, rang for Miss Buncle, and disappeared.

'You haven't been with us very long, you know, Mr. Yeoman. What do you think would be fair?'

'You're paying me five pounds, Miss Buncle. I want eight.'

'We really can't pay that. You know how little money there is in the travel business.'

'Well, I was thinking of leaving Wiesbaden anyway. I've an urge to try my luck at something else.'

'Oh, we don't want to lose you like that. We'll pay you eight pounds.'

'I think perhaps it would be better if I moved on. I'm restless inside, and don't want to get into a rut.'

'Oh, you needn't fear that. There are great prospects. I foresee that Plantudor will grow and grow, and there will be plenty of openings for really useful young men.'

'Nevertheless, Miss Buncle, I don't see much in it for me.'

'Now, look, Mr. Yeoman, I particularly don't want Mr. Plantudor upset just now. We'll pay you ten pounds.'

Soon further promotion followed: Mark was given the job of Captain Limber, Plantudor's Senior Young Gentleman. Young Gentlemen were difficult; most of the Young Gentlemen, though

dazzled at first by the apparent prospect of making paid pleasure trips about Europe, soon tired of the labour these in fact entailed, which consisted of arguments with porters about old Mrs. Bleat's claim to a seat facing the engine, or with hotel-keepers about the filling of Miss Flannel's hot-water bottle.

Captain Limber was good-looking and easy-mannered, and tackled such problems with masterful good humour, but he had weaknesses. The Young Gentlemen were exposed to certain temptations and those of them who did not depart willingly were usually discharged because old Mrs. Bleat saw them kissing young Miss Keyboard, or because Miss Flannel, seeking them in some dire crisis about her hot-water bottle, found them in the bar with some of their male charges.

Captain Limber (late Royal Artillery) yielded habitually to both temptations. For him, each convoy was an amorous and alcoholic adventure.

One day, when Mark went down to the steamer at Mainz to meet Captain Limber, he found the colonels glaring, the maiden ladies trembling, and the typists tittering. As they came ashore Captain Limber, who seemed to think he was a German, tried to form them up and drill them, marching about the quayside with his legs shooting out in imitation of the German parade step.

Mark contrived to get them all into their buses and delivered to their hotels, in Wiesbaden. He had left Captain Limber singing loudly by the riverside, and went to the Plantudor offices wondering how to explain his colleague's absence. As he reached them, however, he saw Captain Limber stagger up and fall through the swing doors. He followed in time to see Aubrey Plantudor take one startled look and vanish, leaving the crisis to Miss Buncle.

Captain Limber's eyes seemed to look through Miss Buncle. However, he saw her, for he said loudly, 'Hello, Buncle. Come and kiss your uncle'.

'Captain Limber! How dare you come here like this?'

'Now, now, Buncle. Naughty, naughty. Where's Aubrey? Where's naughty Aubrey? Aubrey, Aubrey, Aubrey! AUB-REY!'

But Aubrey knew when to be deaf. Captain Limber began to roll merrily round the room in pursuit of Miss Buncle. Singing

'Buncle, Buncle, come to your uncle, do', he made for her, lustful intent upon his face. Mark, crippled with laughter, saw Miss Buncle gaze at him in horror. Her curves were not calculated to lessen Captain Limber's ardour in this moment.

Miss Buncle, for once, seemed at her wit's end. That Fine Woman, cool mistress of every emergency, now found herself in a situation she had probably never foreseen, or even hoped for. Mark saw her reach out helpless, protesting arms. She did not push Captain Limber, or even seem to have much hope of repulsing him, and who knows to what lengths his amorous nature, fired by wine, might have carried him, if, striving to clasp her, he had not, like the Germans checked in 1914 on the outskirts of Paris, encountered those last frail defences, her outstretched hands, and fallen flat on his back; where he lay, still calling on his Buncle to come to her uncle.

Mark stole stealthily away. Miss Buncle, he reflected, was a specialist in the business of transporting human beings about Europe; then let her solve the problem of removing Captain Limber. Afterwards, Mark opined (if he knew anything of women) she would feel rather kindly towards Captain Limber and suspect him of having betrayed, in wine, a hopeless love long concealed; or, at the least, to have revealed a most flattering private opinion of her allure.

In this odd manner, Mark became Mr. Yeoman, our Rhineland Representative. In his very small pond, as the nineteen-thirties began, he became a bigger frog. He thought, sometimes, how he would have thanked fortune for this well-paid occupation when Patricia was alive. But such memories as these always brought him to the monstrous realization that he could not have had Patricia without having Sally; and against this everything in him rebelled. The thought filled him with bitter resentment against life, and sometimes put into his brooding brain the idea that such a life was better done with. His reason told him that nothing in life could be more stupid than regrets for past mistakes or past misfortunes; yet he could not overcome these regrets. The insoluble riddle of his past was always with him, like a pain. As time passed his anger with Sally cooled, but his self-reproaches grew more violent. For the future he took no thought at all. He noticed, with the cynicism which his life had bred in him, that

another war was apparently being prepared, but he was indifferent about that.

He had few friends, and noticed in himself a tendency to avoid his kind. He bought a canoe, and when he was off duty, made lonely voyages on the Rhine.

CHAPTER 21

FEW lives can be so empty of vital content, Mark found as the nineteen-thirties got into their stride, as that of an occidental dragoman, a tourists' guide in Western Europe. As he did not much care about life, this did not matter; but when he gave thought to it, he was astonished by the dullness of the people he shepherded about and by his own stupidity in bothering with them.

'Is that the Lorelei, Mr. Yeoman?'

'Yes, that's it, Miss Portable.'

'I thought Lorelei was a girl.'

'Well, in the fairy-tale she's supposed to be a beautiful maiden who sits on that headland and combs her golden hair, so that the sailors forget to keep their eye on the helm and get wrecked. You know what women are, Miss Portable; they think admiration well worth a shipwreck, especially if they are not on board the ship.'

'Oh, Mr. Yeoman, you are awful.'

'I do my best.'

'Does she sit up there, er . . . you know, with nothing on?'

'You mean, in the altogether, in all sorts of weather? Well, yes and no; it was before the days of bobbing, you know, and she had very *long* hair. That's the story, anyway. Of course, we can't verify now that women's hair was really so much longer in those days. If it wasn't, that would mean that what distracted the sailors' attention wasn't her hair, if you take my meaning, Miss Portable. In that case, I suppose Lorelei just told the coroner afterwards (in that artless round-eyed way; you know, Miss Portable?) "I think he must have been watching me comb my hair, sir". Anyway, it's a good alibi.'

'Aren't you cynical, Mr. Yeoman! Do you think women are so bad?'

'Ah, I see you know all the questions, Miss Portable. If the Rhine were longer I should tell you about my love life. How are you enjoying yourself?'

'Oh, it's lovely. I think the Germans are ever so nice, not a bit like what I expected.'

'How dull life would be for a girl if everything came about as a girl expected. . . .'

'Funny lot, these Germans, Yeoman.'

'You mean they have a keen sense of fun, Colonel?'

'No, I mean they haven't. No sense of humour.'

'Ah, I see. And they mayn't walk on the grass.'

'That's right. And everything verboten.'

'And no word in their language for gentleman.'

'Precisely. You'll never make democrats of them.'

'I don't suppose I will, Colonel.'

'What they want is a bit of the public school spirit.'

'The *team* spirit.'

'Yes, yes, that's it, the team spirit. Personally I can't stand these foreigners.'

'I wonder they go on being foreigners, Colonel. . . .'

'Herr Jomann, Herr Jomann.'

'What's wrong, Hans?'

'The old Herr in cabin number one, he is cracked. He orders a glass of sherry, I bring it, and now he makes a fearful noise.'

'Did you give him sherry wine or sherry brandy, Hans?'

'Sherry brandy, Herr Jomann. What in the devil's name is sherry wine? Kirschwasser?'

'No, that's cherry gin. I wish you'd learn English, Hans. I suppose I'll have to drink the cherry brandy. You'll either bankrupt me or give me alcoholic poisoning. Only yesterday I had to drink three large glasses of Italian vermouth because you don't know that Dry Martini means one gin cocktail.'

'And Herr Jomann, the old aunt in the second cabin . . .'

'Hans, Hans, there are no old aunts among our passengers. If you mean Miss Abernethy, her rank, profession, condition and description is that of colonel's sister.'

'Well, good, she screams for digestive biscuits. What is that, Herr Jomann?'

'Just another vanity of the human flesh, Hans. Just another of our old English customs. One of the means by which our English gentleladies absurdly hope to repair the linings of their stomachs from the ravages of tea.'

'Thou dear God, how shall a man know what he has to do. . . .'

Such was the daily content of Mark Yeoman's life while the steamers chug-chugged, the Plantourists chattered, and the castles of the Rhine and two of his years slipped by. In the winter Aubrey, Miss Buncle and he went down to Zurich for the winter sports season; in the spring they returned to Wiesbaden. The life suited him in one way: he needed, for his own special reasons, the narcotic, or stimulant, of movement. Though he was become a vagrant, he was no beachcomber. Changing scenes, shifting skies and new horizons kept him alert, and his mind from dwelling on things he wanted to forget.

He came to feel an affectionate disdain for his charges. The same characters always reappeared in each new convoy, and they were the characters of the comic papers; they even outdid the caricatures of their kind. Miss Portable, who dressed so neatly for The Office in London, wandered about Nuremberg in scanty shorts (much admired a year earlier at Southend). Young Mr. Daileigh, who in England loved above all things to put on his Dinner Jacket, wore an open-necked shirt, revealing the full glory of his adam's apple, at dinner in the hotel at Bruges. Old General Poona told an astonished German, who insisted on closing a window in the train, that this was Nicht Kricket, and expected to be understood. Mrs. Bath-Malvern, who believed in being nice to foreigners (they all spoke of their hosts in the lands they visited as These Foreigners) asked a French railway attendant about a ribbon he wore, and on being told that it was the Military Medal, replied in affable and hideous French, 'Ah, decorations are not facile to gain in the army britannic'.

Between these innocents abroad, who never Mark Twain had met, and the Germans, Mark hungered for somebody to talk to. The Plantourists endlessly repeated a few lunatic remarks about

Foreigners; the Germans never refrained for longer than fifteen minutes from talking about the wrongs of Germany.

This caused Mark to frequent Joe Gradeley's riverside beershop in Mainz. The Boys were gone, and still the Germans would not come to it, but Joe had now a few regular customers, Swiss and Hollanders from the great barges which plied on the Rhine. These were men more friendly than the Germans, more enlightened than the Plantourists, and Mark, who felt himself the citizen of a wider world than this little one of political squabbling, eagerly sought their company in his leisure time.

Joe's was their favourite café in Mainz, and Mark's best friends among them were Captain Bundli of Basel, and Captain van Dunen, of Rotterdam. To sit with them and discuss the silly world outside was like sitting with the Gods on high Olympus. Beside them, the broad Rhine strove vigorously from the mountains to the sea; around them, the virile, resentful spirit of Germany imparted disquieting vibrations, perceptible to any sensitive man, to the very air; but at their table were good fellowship and wide experience and deep laughter.

'Ah, colleague Yeoman, good evening. You become an old hand on the Rhine. We shall have to elect you an honorary member of the guild. Do you seek refuge with us again, from the eternal politics and the tip-tap misses?'

'Evening, Captain Bundli, 'evening, Captain van Dunen. Yes, I am the first English refugee. I cannot listen to any more about the wicked League of Nations and the brutal French.'

'Ach, the Germans were ever so. They think too much about their country; and your compatriots, Colleague Yeoman, think too little about theirs. But you have your compensations. That was a pretty thing, the little miss you were on deck with, above Coblenz.'

'Captain van Dunen, your eyes miss nothing. I didn't see you.'

'You were too busy. Bundli, you and I have to seek our sweet-hearts when we come ashore. Yeoman gets them delivered free on board.'

'Was she pretty, then?'

'Captain Bundli, it is a libel. Captain van Dunen saw me doing my duty, which includes polite attentions to the younger ladies among my flock.'

'In the moonlight, near Coblenz?'

'In the moonlight. The moon is among the employees of Plantador's Planned Tours.'

'Another tip-tap miss?'

'No, a sports mistress.'

'And sportive?'

'After all, she has to keep in practice.'

'You pirate, Herr Yeoman. Why am not I captain of a pleasure steamer?'

'In that case your duty would confine you to the bridge, Captain van Dunen. Pleasure in a pleasure steamer is not for the captain. But Miss La Crosse was nothing to me but an un-completed embrace, invited by her from propinquity and refused by me from cussedness. I left her the stuff that dreams are made of: namely, a kiss renounced on the moonlit Rhine. I think that, when she is middle-aged and sports shall be no more, she will retire to a whimsy little cottage near Taunton, and over the inglenook will hang, between a hockey stick and a tennis racket, a watercolour of the Rhine, and when her cronies foregather for tea she will glance at it, and murmur a cryptic word, and they, all girls together, will at once understand that even Miss La Crosse . . . you know?'

'Ach, you flatter yourself. She will only think you had eaten onions. How did you learn such fabulous German?'

'I was helped a little by living dictionaries. Tell me rather how you came to speak such perfect English.'

'Ah, by us that comprehends itself. All Hollanders speak several languages. We like to understand our neighbours, and it is good for business.'

'And you, Captain Bundli?'

'My dear Herr Yeoman, English is really our national language. Destiny has given us almost a monopoly of the second greatest industry in the world, that of peacemaking. As the rest of Europe is usually busy with the greatest industry of all, making war, we have much to do. We need to speak English, so that we may look after your prisoners for you when you are at war (you know, the time when you call us "bloody neutrals"), organize your peace conferences, and offer you hospitality during those rare periods when you are actually at peace.'

'Ah, happy, happy Switzerland.'

'I always suspect an Englishman of sarcasm when he says "Happy Switzerland". I often hear English people talking about us who forget that I may understand them. "Lovely country, isn't it?" they say, "but rather too much like a picture postcard." "Nice people, the Swiss, but infuriatingly complacent." "Run their country well, don't they? But they think only of money." As if your English charm and beauty should be enough reward!'

'Ja, Bundli, it is the same in Holland. They come to see us and demand to see a windmill and some tulips. Then they say in chorus, "Lovely! Sweet!" Then they talk to each other about "The Dutch" (we do not like to be called Dutchmen), and shout, under my ears, "In matters of commerce the fault of the Dutch is giving too little and asking too much".'

'Let me explain, dear colleagues. Somewhere in England is a college where little English boys and girls go to learn about Foreigners. They are taught a few simple notions. Among these are, that the French language has no word for home, and that the French, therefore, are not home-lovers; that the French, because their prostitutes ply their trade in houses, instead of in the gutter, are disgustingly immoral; that The Continental Sunday is sacrilegious, because the Continental Churches are full on that day; that the Germans eat only sausages and are ludicrous; that the Swiss do not give the English enough and that the Dutch charge the English too much; that the French eat frogs and snails instead of eels and winkles, and are depraved; that the Spanish kill bulls instead of foxes and are vicious; that the Chinese wear pigtails and are comic, since wealthy Englishmen stopped wearing them a century ago; that none of these play cricket and all are accordingly uncivilized.'

'It is fantastic,' said Captain Bundli.

'It is incredible and also true,' said Captain van Dunen.

'It was even funny once,' said Mark, 'but it's gone on so long it's a bore now.'

The two captains called together for the waiter, as who should say, the only answer to some problems is to order another glass of Korn.

'Nevertheless, we respect your compatriots immensely for two

things,' said Captain van Dunen. 'One is the stroke of genius by which they induced the Creator to place the Channel between them and the mainland, and the other is the British Navy.'

'Ah, yes, the British Navy. That justifies even the British.'

'You are right, Bundli. If the British Navy should ever be sunk, or the Channel dry up, the English would be a submerged and forgotten race within a month. *But so should we!*'

'Yes, that is the point, Herr Yeoman. We feel, towards the English, like a man who goes for a ride in a very fast motor-car with a friend who is mad. We like him, yes; but why does he imperil our life? We cannot get out; we have to sit and hope for the best.'

'Ja, ja, that is the ridiculous paradox. We Hollanders, we feel like indulgent parents towards incorrigibly backward children when we meet the English. But when we, inside our little frontiers, look at Europe, and then at the Channel, the British island, and the British Navy, we feel like small, defenceless children who look towards their parents. We have the knowledge of wise old age, and the feebleness of little children; England has the strength of manhood, and the mind of a suckling. We know that while the Channel remains wet, and the British Navy strong, and Britain retains the will to resist, we others, who have no fortunate moat, shall also be free; and we know that, if any of these three things cease to be, we others, who have no blame, must through no fault of our own be carried away by Britain's disaster. That is why we look at every Englishman with mixed feelings, Mr. Yeoman. It is maddening to feel that we know better than he, but that fate has put in his pocket the keys to our future.'

'Yes, that is truth. And soon we shall see what is to be, Herr Yeoman.'

'You mean, another war, Captain Bundli?'

'Now that you have given back the Rhineland, of course, Herr Yeoman. You know what goes on here in Germany. Only a strong British policy can now stop a new war. And the only people who pretend there will not be another war are those who alone could prevent one: your English politicians! We tremble when we read their speeches. It is frightful to think that our fate is in their hands. They seem to be of a childish ignorance.'

'Oh, I believe it is a condition of becoming a British Minister

that you should not be able to speak any foreign language except Greek or Latin, and those in a form, of course, no longer comprehensible in Greece or Rome. But do not take my fellow-countrymen seriously, Captains Two. They have many good qualities, but lack one: a sense of humour. The scientists have not yet contrived to supply them with it in capsule form. When they can take it at night, with their cup of Oblongtime, all will be well. For the present they are the most grimly humourless people in the world. They suspect this and like foreigners to laugh at them, because it makes them think they must be funny after all. Have you noticed the large number of middle-aged misses among my clients?

'Yes, you are followed everywhere by what looks like a regiment of Prussian Grenadiers which has undergone a change of sex.'

'Exactly, Captain van Dunen. Well, in London, everybody has been going to a play called *Autumn Crocus*. It is about a miss, who is nearer autumn than spring, who goes to the Tyrol, sees a good-looking young innkeeper, and, on learning that he is married, immediately returns to England. This is what English Bishops call a happy ending. The moral of the tale, however, for all the misses who have seen the play, seems to be that all such should immediately go to the Alps, and capture an innkeeper, married or single. Hence the number of my autumnal misses. With me, they admire the beauties of the Black Forest; but dotted lines lead from their eyes to the nearest inn. The innkeepers are elderly, red-faced men with large red-faced wives who are clearly suspicious of English misses. This does not deter them. This play has made the world unsafe for innkeepers. There is a cannibal glare in the eyes of these ladies which until now has only been seen in English cathedral cities, at the hour when they go out in search of tea, toast and cakes. It worries me. When I hear that one of them has forcibly abducted an innkeeper, I shall resign.'

'Ach, our poor Yeoman. What will you do then?'

'I shall ship with you, Captain van Dunen, or you, Captain Bundli, and sail the Rhine for the rest of my days, knowing that I am a humble labourer on a great highway which, if I choose to follow it through, will take me to the North or the South Pole, the Far East or the Golden West. I shall be as free as wingless man can be, and when I die, hundreds of years old, I shall have

my ashes strewn on the English cliffs where I grew up, on the sands at Zandvoort, and on Lake Constance, and at each place a poor man modestly rewarded under my will, will cry, 'This was a homeless but a happy Englishman'.

'Do you not want home and wife and children, then?'

'No, I've tried that.'

'Ah, I see, pardon. Well, it is a pretty dream, but I fear the Germans and your English politicians, between them, will spoil it for you. . . .'

Mark Yeoman had come to feel strangely detached from the land of his birth. He nursed grievances against it for things which were his own mistakes, but which had left so deep a scar on his spirit that he could not forget his resentment. When he sat with Captains Bundli and van Dunen, on such evenings as this, with Joe watching them from his bar and throwing in an 'Ay' or a 'Nay', he felt that he belonged to no particular country, that he was a member of some super-national jury that watched and marvelled at the idiocy of mankind: for of the fate towards which this ass, mankind, was plodding again, none of them had any doubt. But they were good, those evenings with the lights coming out along the Rhine, the dark shapes of moored barges leaning on the stream, trams clanging over the bridges, brightly-lit pleasure steamers trailing red, green and golden curlicues in the water. . . .

It was an interlude in Mark's life. The tourist business slumped. Currencies fell, trade declined, and in England, strange and unique sign of crisis, an aged Royal Duke, who might have exclaimed with a famous Austrian Emperor, 'Nothing is spared me', went to Torquay instead of to the Riviera, thus admonishing the patriotic English to spend their holidays (and their pounds) at home. In Wiesbaden, where hotels were half empty, Aubrey Plantudor was so harassed that he rang incessantly for Miss Buncle to do his worrying for him. He deputed Miss Buncle, too, to cut down Mark's salary, but as they needed him, and he refused to take less, she failed in this enterprise. Mark learned about women from Miss Buncle. Through watching her he realized that a masterful woman, as completely given to one man as she to her Aubrey, would gladly rend any other man to pieces, if this would advance the cause of her lord. He was resolved not to provide the titbit for this manly woman to bring her womanly man in the nest.

Joe Gradeley was despondent. In Germany was a great rising unrest, a silent tumult which no man could ignore. Joe looked back with regret to the great days of the army of occupation, and forward with alarm.

'These blinking Germans won't come here because I'm an Englishman, Mr. Yeoman.'

'You think they dislike us so much?'

'No, they want to get their own back on us, but that isn't why they don't coom here. You know how they are, every one of 'em talks politics even when he's asleep, and when he goes out he wants to meet other chaps he can talk politics to. The Communists have their own houses, these Naatsis have theirs, and the Nationalists go to the old-fashioned hotels. They won't mix. They can't argue, it makes 'em angry, so they go where they know they'll be with other chaps as think like they do and they can keep on agreeing with each other and drinking each other's health and everything's loovely. They think I'd be listening to them and making notes of what they say and sending 'em back to London. What are you laughing at, Mr. Yeoman?'

'I was thinking of a German band that used to play in a street where I lived as a boy. They were just like that, Joe.'

'Ee, they're all alike. Mind you, I like 'em well enough. But they're too easily led. They're going to make anoother packet o' trouble for us one o' these days. But our folks are easily led, too. Fancy the silly choomps taking the army of occupation away five years before it was due to go and thinking that would do 'em any good. It's a foony business, Mr. Yeoman: the Germans getting ready for anoother war, and our folks making it easy for 'em. I'd like to know who's behind that. You mark my words, Mr. Yeoman, there's folks as is better off through these wars, and they're not the likes of you or me. If we knew who it was we'd know why this new war is being prepared. Ee, I'm worried all right. I've got Emma to think about, and the boy.'

'What, Karl Joseph. He's only three, Joe.'

'In fifteen years he'll be eighteen, and if I'm still here the Germans won't stop to ask whether he's a British subject. . . .'

'Zhoe! Ach, goot efening, Mr. Jomann. Karl Joseph, say goot efening to Mr. Jomann.'

'Guten Abend, Mr. Jomann.'

'Nein, nein, sprich doch *Englisch!*'

'Goot eefning.'

'Good evening, Karl Joseph. How's things?'

'Please?'

'How goes it with thee?'

'Thank you, good. . . .'

Queer things, the war has done, thought Mark, as he watched Karl Joseph. He thought of Patrick and Pierre, of Roger and himself. What knots this twentieth century tied in the lives of simple people. Would little Karl Joseph Gradeley, in thirty years, be embittered and bewildered? He saw Emma's hand unconsciously fondle Karl Joseph's head, Joe look down and smile. Karl Joseph was the future, the future for which Joe had fought, which Joe now feared. As Joe reached down and took the future in his arms, Mark thought of Patricia. . . .

One day, unsuspected by Mark, the interlude in Wiesbaden came to an end. He set out for Berlin with a small company of Plantador's tourists; the few who now came were more eager to 'see' Berlin, which was notorious as the most vicious city in Europe, than the castles of the Rhine. Mark's charges were mainly young people: girls who were curious to see 'these awful Naatsis', and young men who, he knew, would want him to show them 'life', by which they meant the living death of Berlin's night-clubs. They had all heard of the homo-sexual cabarets, where young men of their own age dressed as women, and were most anxious to see for themselves just how disgusting these were. They also longed to visit the nudist camps on the lakes around Berlin. The inmates of these places were usually decent people who gave themselves to the cult, as a form of escape from their over-bumbled times, with devout and devoted Germanic enthusiasm. Mark would as soon have conducted a band of nudists into a nunnery, as his own clothed Peeping Toms into one of these reservations.

If ever he felt inclined to go out with any of his charges, therefore, he led them to the Babylon Bar, a place, dull enough, where they might yet find that which they left England to see: namely, Life, according to their lights, or darkness. And in the Babylon Bar, Mark began a new chapter in his own life.

Young Mr. Fortescue-Smythe, of Aught and Naught, Chartered Accountants, and his friend, Mr. Guy Wyse, who hired mechani-

cal robbers, called betting machines, to the drinking clubs of London were responsible.

'What about a pub-crawl this evening, Mr. Yeoman?'

'Well, we can spend an hour at the Babylon Bar, if you like.'

'Sounds all right. Is it one of those, er . . .'

'No. But it's quite fun. You can bathe there.'

'*Bathe!* What, not . . .'

'No, not. Swimming costumes are compulsory. There are girls there, bathing beauties, they're called.'

'Go on! In a bar! That sounds good, doesn't it, Guy? I said to him, you'd know where to go, Mr. Yeoman. I bet you know Berlin!'

'Ha, ha. I bet he does!'

'Of course I do, I've been here often enough.'

'Wish I could speak German. You ever been to one of these nudist camps?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Suppose you couldn't get *us* into one?'

'Would you feel equal to it? The members are usually of exceptional physique — I think that's why they become nudists — and brown, all over. It's surprising how standards change, when you find yourself suddenly naked among others who are used to it.'

'What, mean to say *we'd* have to take our clothes off?'

'Of course, they're not behind bars, on show to visitors.'

Happily, nakedness was not essential in the Babylon Bar, and Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse arrived there with the uplifting sense of superiority imparted by their plus-fours. They were as children in wonderland. For the Babylon Bar was many bars, all bars to all men: a Wild West Bar (where you sat on barrels and the Rumanian pianist was dressed cowboy fashion); an Alpine Bar (all edelweiss and gentian, log-walls, and glimpses of glistening snowscapes through the windows); a Rhineland Bar (with steamers on the Rhine, real vineyards, rainstorms of real water, and real wind from a real wind machine); a Grinzing Bar (with a view of Vienna, the Danube, Saint Stephen's Church, the Prater, and the Big Wheel); and many more. And everywhere there were girls!

Through all these Mark led them to the Lido Bar, a swimming pool with tables set beneath striped sunshades on three sides; and,

at the shallow end, a little strand, where girls in bathing costumes reclined, and two well-built young men who earned part of their living, at least, by these nightly appearances. Looking at these two, Mark felt that Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse would not want to bathe.

They loved it! Around the pool sat girls, lovely creatures in exquisite frocks, with beautifully dressed hair. They looked like the picked fruit of Berlin society. Moreover, they showed candid interest in Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse. These two, as practical men (and one of them a mathematician) clearly wondered why this interest, instead of being dispatched across the pool to themselves by eyes brown and blue, was not directed towards the two athletes, to whom, they saw, no attention was paid by these golden girls. They knew the worth of their plus-fours, but a small doubt still remained in their minds.

'This is a fine place. I'm glad you brought us here, Yeoman, I thought you'd know the ropes. But, I say, what are all these girls?'

Mark looked round. He knew the daytime life of these pretty moths: the cheap rooms in Moabit, the snack meals of Bismarck herrings at Aschinger's, the menace of rent, the anxiety about the total of each evening's tips.

'They are the Madis vom Chantant, the ladies of the place.'

'Don't mean to say they're here to get off? They look so . . . I mean to say, if I met them in the street I should think they were ladies.'

'Who says they are not? Their company, however, is purchasable.'

'You mean, they'd Go Home with you?'

'Not necessarily. Some of them are contributing to the support of the two beachcombers, the members of the band, or the waiters, and *their* arrangements about Going Home are made. The others would do so, either if they are sufficiently low in funds, or if you are interesting enough for them to overlook financial considerations. The second event is rare, however.'

'Well, I'm blessed. I wouldn't have believed it, would you, Guy? They look so . . . ladylike.'

A dainty telephone on their table rang. Mr. Fortescue-Smythe took the receiver and Mark saw incredulous bliss dawn

on his face when, after opening passages in pidgin English, he raised his head, looked across the pool, and found the dark, white-gowned princess who called him.

'She wants us to go over, Guy. She says she's got a friend who wants to talk to you. She must have liked the looks of us.'

'Who could help it?' said Mark. 'By the way, if you're not coming back, you might telephone, will you? You know my number.'

He was left with a half-bottle of German champagne. The Lido Bar filled, with burly German businessmen who came in heavy with masculine dignity, as who should say, 'I know this kind of place; just a glass of wine and then an early bed for me'. They ignored the tinkling telephones and exchanged deep, man-to-man conversation with each other. After their first bottle, however, they exchanged smiling glances with the girls who telephoned them, shaking their heads negatively, with indulgent good humour. After the second, they telephoned themselves, and after the third, they were sitting with the girls, sliding thick arms round slim waists, joking loudly and lewdly and filling the air with cigar smoke. On the golden shore the two lotus-eaters strolled about, peacock-like; all the girls save one had left them, to dress and share in the evening's harvest at the tables; and this last survivor, a professional diver in a pink swimming suit, read a picture magazine called *Mein Film*.

Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse were stoutly besieging what, they did not perceive, were undefended citadels. The girls laughed, whispered, patted their hands, stroked their cheeks and looked adoringly at them. They swelled visibly with gratified self-esteem; they laughed louder, and held their liquor worse, than any.

Then two glances met in mid-air over the bathing-pool and by their encounter joined one of those tales of two people, of which the human comedy is made. Mark saw, opposite him, two women sitting alone. They wore hats, left telephone calls unanswered, and obviously were not of the women of the place. One of them remained for ever a shadow in his memory. The one he saw was a woman of about twenty-five, with a pale face and deeply-shadowed grey eyes. A big black hat with a sweeping curve sat on her incredibly golden hair — incredible to any who lacked the

secret of making gold — and her black dress blatantly proclaimed a most exceptional figure.

Mark was with a little wine and she looked at him with a calm, strangely hostile scrutiny. Suddenly he took the telephone and dialled the number of her table. He saw the shadow of a smile and she raised the receiver.

‘Well.’

‘May I come and talk to you, gracious lady?’

‘Come, if you wish.’ Above the din sounded an even louder hullabaloo as Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse saw him go to her; they waved and roared with laughter. ‘Your friends are very cheerful. The maids seem to please them.’

‘I think rather that they are so happy because they think they please the maids.’

‘Mein Gott, that is not hard, if they have money.’

‘True. Only I am not sure whether my friends know that.’

‘Then they are very simple. Why do they wear that comic dress?’

‘Comic? Gracious lady, it is our national costume!’

‘Ach, pardon, I did not know the English have a national costume. However, I do not think it beautiful. The legs!’

‘But may not we men sometimes show our legs?’

‘That depends on the shape.’

‘The rule holds good for the ladies, too, but I have not remarked that they observe it. The legs which one sees!’

‘I think your friends are students, *nicht wahr?*’

‘Students! Gracious lady, they have nothing left to learn. They are important men of affairs, in England; tourists, in Germany.’

‘Really? They bely their looks. And you?’

‘I am a tourists’ guide.’

‘Comic are the English. I held you for an officer.’

‘I was that, by chance, once. But in England “officer” is not a calling that occupies a man from cradle to grave. It is, for most of us, just one of many parts that we play in our time. But I did not think you had even seen me, until I telephoned. I was watching you, however.’

‘Why?’

‘Gracious lady, you must ask your mirror that.’

If Mark had not said that they would probably have parted, neither the worse. But this prehistoric tribute was fresh enough to catch the fancy of an experienced woman.

'That is prettily said. Are your friends staying long in Berlin?'

'They leave to-morrow. I, too.'

'*Ach*, a pity. It would have been pleasant to meet again. But look, I fear your friends have failed to please the little ladies.'

Mark looked. Mr. Fortescue-Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse were back at their table. The two girls sat alone; behind their flawless composure, Mark perceived that they were furious. Mr. Fortescue Smythe and Mr. Guy Wyse were still merry, but truculently so. 'We *are* having a good time, so there!' they seemed to say. Their vinous sunniness had passed its zenith; after noonday heat, the cool of evening, and each sip they now took was, not new invigoration, but the bitter foretaste of a hangover. They had clearly suffered some rankling hurt.

'I think I'll see how they're getting on,' he said.

'But you will come back.'

'Yes, indeed I will.'

'Well, you've left your lady friends,' he said, as he came to them.

'Left 'em sitting. They thought they'd got hold of a couple of mugs. They wanted us to give them Money! A little present, they called it. After we'd bought 'em three bottles of champagne, and chocolates, and a doll each.'

'But, boys of the bulldog breed, do you think they are here to drink champagne? I explained to you why they came here. If tired business men want pleasant company, they may have it, at a modest price. They don't want much, but they're here to earn a living.'

'You didn't tell us they wanted Money.'

'What on earth did you think they wanted? Fortunately, they'll get a little back on the sweets and dolls. Did you believe those pretty girls were captivated by you?'

'Well, I don't care, I don't like being asked for Money. If they hadn't asked, we might have given them something.'

'Yes, you *might*. What the devil difference does it make, whether you give it asked for or unasked?'

'I think it's Dishonest,' said Mr. Guy Wyse, whose machines,

with mechanism adjusted to earn a profit of about ten thousand per cent from the tipplers, stood in innumerable West End bars, 'to pretend that they're only here for a Good Time, when they really want Money.'

Mark loathed Mr. Guy Wyse. 'Mr. Wyse,' he said, 'if you think those girls had a good time, because you sat with them, you are an ass.'

'Look here . . .'

And at that instant, chance, watching the game, decided to have fun with Mark's life and sent a roaring American rolling along who, without by your leave, seated himself at their table.

'Hiya, boys,' he shouted drunkenly, 'have a drink. Wozzis?' and he seized Mark's empty bottle, pitched it sideways from him without looking where it went, and began to shout 'Wayer! Wayer!'

The next few moments remained in Mark's memory afterwards like a scene from a slapstick film, turned very quickly. He had a glimpse of a bottle flying across the pool and hitting an Egyptian on the forehead, which was bent attentively towards Mr. Fortescue-Smythe's deserted Russian princess. Then followed a series of snapshots, of the Egyptian, with blood trickling down his cheek, glaring at Mark, who was laughing hard; of the Egyptian clamouring for directors and head-waiters and shouting and pointing across the pool; of the American, swaying and shouting 'Wayer!'; of the Egyptian suddenly breaking away and dashing round the pool, followed by directors and head-waiters; and, finally, a close up of the American looking round, seeing a rabid dark man, and promptly knocking him into the pool, with tremendous splash.

After that there was pandemonium, men shouting and girls screaming, police, and Mark and the American being frog-marched out of the Babylon Bar. At the police station the American fell into an alcoholic stupor and Mark was left to face the Commissar.

'So, you are Englander!'

'Yes.'

'But you are not drunk, like your friend here!'

'I am not drunk, never have been drunk, and he is not my friend. I've never seen him before.'

'If you are not drunk, so is it all the worse that you behave

yourself thus. That is an untruth, that you do not know the man. He was at your table.'

'He was drunk and came there.'

'Herr, you cannot deceive German justice. It is unheard of that you come here and throw bottles. If you wish to box-fight you must stay at home. You might have killed the gentleman. He is gravely injured. Suchlike is not seemly.'

'Herr Kommissar, I didn't throw the bottle. Ask the waiters.' But the two waiters who had come with them shrugged and said they had not seen who threw the bottle.

'You stay here to-night, my friend. To-morrow we will see, whether you are to be charged with attempted manslaughter or only grave bodily injury.'

'Look here, Herr Kommissar, I'll be damned if I stay here. I didn't throw the blasted bottle. If you want to know, our tipsy friend here threw it.'

'So! You make it only worse for yourself. Now you wish to put the blame on another.'

'Oh, rats.'

'And that, mein Herr, is an insult to an official and an additional offence.'

'Good health.'

'SILENCE.'

'Herr Kommissar.'

'Well, what is it now? Who is that?'

From behind two waiters and nine policemen appeared the woman whom Mark had invited to look in her mirror. She told her story. She had seen the bottle thrown, and who threw it.

The Commissar became genial. 'Now, good,' he said, 'everything well that finishes well. I am glad, Herr Jomann, that this lady has been able to clear the matter up. It grieves me that you were wrongly suspected. I need not keep you longer. You may pay the fine of ten marks and go.'

'Fine? You ought to pay me ten marks, for my wasted time and wounded pride.'

'Herr Jomann, you have disturbed the peace and distinguished yourself by unseemly behaviour here, including an insult to an official.'

'Good. Where are the cells?'

'You refuse to pay?'

'I won't pay ten marks if you keep me here a year.'

'Ach, you are like be quick, yes?'

'What?'

'Be quick. Be quick.'

'Be quick what?'

'BE QUICK. BE QUICK BABERS.'

'Oh, Pickwick. Yes, I'm exactly like Pickwick. I won't pay, and chops and tomato sauce to you, and look that one up.'

'Lead the accused away.'

'Good night, gracious lady. I shall not be leaving Berlin to-morrow, after all.'

After five minutes in the cell, where the American was snoring loudly, the door opened and Mark was led back.

'You may go, Herr Jomann.'

'How? I must stay, I may go. Make up your mind, Herr Kommissar. I do not wish to go. I shall stay here until I have an official apology from the German Government, and compensation for my wrongful arrest, for unseemly behaviour towards me, and for an insult to a non-official.'

'Regret, mein Herr, we have no room. You must seek another hotel.'

'So! Now you turn me into the night. Is this German guest-friendliness?'

'Jawohl, that it is. And it is no longer night, but morning. Your fine has been paid.'

'Damnation! By whom?'

'That is irrelevant. Auf wiedersehen, Herr Jomann.'

'Auf nimmerwiedersehen, Herr Kommissar.'

Outside, in that dawn which always looks so repulsively grey after such a night, she waited. He was angry and rude.

'How dare you take it on yourself to pay the fine? It was my affair, not yours.'

She looked at him calmly. 'I did not want to breakfast alone,' she said.

He could only laugh at that. They breakfasted from coffee and rolls, at the Kranzler Ecke, and afterwards he telegraphed his resignation to Plantador. There was a moment, he thought, when the best of friends must part, and this was it.

Then with the blonde woman at his side, he turned to face the future.

Six months later, on a raw winter's night, when he stood in the Wilhelmstrasse, she was still by his side. The little joke, which chance had played on him, was already growing up; the tale of two people already ran to several chapters.

These two human beings stood pressed together in a stupendous, howling mob. They saw the man Hitler put his head out of the window, saw the searchlights fasten on him, saw him salute, hour after hour, as the yelling cohorts tramp-tramped beneath. They could not escape, had they wished: like untold millions all over Europe, they were imprisoned in the machine that made the new war. The noise beat on their brains until they were dazed and deafened. Once more it was dawn when they were able to make their way, through quieter streets, to an early breakfast at Kranzler's. As they drank their coffee Mark was very quiet.

'What's troubling you?' she said. 'You're very silent.'

'I don't like the sound of a mob,' he said. 'I first heard it when this century began, at home. There was a little war, of which thou hast never heard, perhaps, Erika, and in it a little siege, and the little English garrison was relieved, and then I heard, as a small child, this noise which we have just heard. Then there was the Great War, and on the first and the last day of it I heard this noise again, this sound of hyenas and wolves, of apes and baboons, of drunkards and madfolk. I was in an ambulance with a dying man, that last day of the last war, and he shrieked "Stop that noise, for God's sake stop that noise". His was only one voice, and the voice of a dying man, but it drowned all that tumult outside. And now I hear this bestial noise again, in Wiesbaden, up and down the Rhine, here in Berlin. It is evil. It empties decent men of dignity, and it makes whores and hags of good women. I hate it. I loathe mankind when I hear it. It makes me wish I were an animal. . . .'

'Now, now, softly, softly,' she said, 'it will not be all so dire. Your nerves are in a bad state. There are other things in life. We have each other.'

He looked at her with hard eyes and spoke roughly. 'Never say that to me,' he said; 'I am not yours, nor are you mine. I have never told you I am yours, or called you mine. I have

always denied it. I am not to be possessed. We are just good friends.'

She looked equably at him, but there was the strange darkening in her eyes, as if a blind dropped over them.

'Very well, then,' she said, 'we are good friends.'

CHAPTER 22

ON a fine spring evening Mark Yeoman sat in the garden of a restaurant tucked into the shoulder of Mount Gellert, the hill which dominates Budapest, waiting for Erika.

Erika von Horst was another interlude in his life, but the trouble with Mark's interludes was that they tended to draw out and dominate the play. When they had met in the Babylon Bar, Mark had been sure that he would never again saddle himself with a woman. Now, two and a half years later, he and Erika were still together.

His great mistake had been to tell her, at the start, savagely, what he thought about women. He could not have chosen a better way to prod her vanity into making the attempt to enchain him. And enchained he had become. His lack of aim in life made him an easy victim. Her insatiable physical passion — a thing he had not encountered before — completed the chain.

They lived a strange life together, in a kind of loving enmity. She mocked and taunted; he constantly told her how indifferent he was to her. Did they like or detest each other? Possibly they did not know who was captor and who captive, but they seemed, in this mad Europe, to need each other and in their physical embraces clung together with a fierce abandon the thought of which was not easily forgotten during their angry daytime disputes.

Up here on Mount Gellert, with a lovely nightscape spread beneath him, Mark felt the contentment which lofty places and a detachment from the confused human scene always gave him. A few hundred feet made all the difference: you found the pattern again. About him the spangled hillside merged into a starry sky: below, the riverside lamps, like golden beads threaded on strings, traced the curve of the broad Danube; on the opposite

bank were the formless glow of cafés and the mazy, changing blur of human movement; beyond were the rooftops and innumerable lights of Pest. The gipsies behind him plucked notes of sadness and madness from the very souls of men.

Far below sounded a faint musical note, like a huntsman's horn: ta-ra, ta-ra. Mark looked down and saw a car cross the nearest bridge. Everybody knew it, from its signal and long white body: it was Erika's. She was on her way to him.

Sipping his Turkish coffee, while he waited for her, he thought of England. Remote though it was, it remained the unchanging background of his life. Distance and time lent no enchantment to his thoughts of it, but he loved even the disenchantment. In England he had experienced the growing embitterment of the first decade after the war; now, though he was far away, he felt, as though he lived with it, the growing fear of the second. The paper in his pocket told him that the Widow's grandson was already twenty-five years on the throne, that England was agog and athrong for another Jubilee. He thought of the old Queen's Diamond Jubilee. (Nelly Yeoman had often told him of lifting him in her arms to see the Queen drive to St. Paul's.) Looking over Budapest, he imagined the flags and bunting in Piccadilly.

Once more there would be shouting and cheering in England. He distrusted them; England ought to be doing other things. 'I would ask you to remember' (he had heard the King's voice say) 'that in days to come you will be the citizens of a great Empire . . . and when the time comes, be ready and proud to give to your country the service of your work, your mind and your heart.' But the time *was* come. Why so many words and so little effort to avert the new war, that all here in Europe knew was brewing? 'Well?' said Erika's voice.

She sat down, leaned on the balustrade, and gazed at Budapest. In profile she looked very young; only in full face did she show the demon in her nature, the strangely hostile eyes, the deep cross-hatching beneath them, the cruel mouth.

That day in 1932, when he unwarily told her of his contempt for womankind, she had ensnared him by having the secretaryship of the Laughing Cat Cabaret Company offered to him. He needed a job, at that moment, and took it without a thought, little suspecting that with it he took Erika and her moods.

The Laughing Cat had been formed in 1919 by Russian refugees. It was immensely popular then, romantic playgoers thronging to see the wasp-waisted men and slim, dark girls in the belief that these were all either former colonels of the Czar's body-guard or fugitive princesses; as, indeed, some of them were. When Mark met the troupe, twelve years later, the princesses had married bankers or brokers and settled down in Zagreb or Lille to await the rebirth of Mother Russia; the colonels had dropped out to open bars in Paris or Belgrade or had gone to the Argentine to look after horses. Of the original Russians only old General Petropavloff remained (unless the producer, manager and com-père counted, who was a Jew from Odessa). Hungarian and Ruthenian dancing-girls, if they could manage to sing *Black Eyes* in Russian, wore the diadems of the departed princesses; the Cossack clothes, repeatedly altered, had passed down a long line of German, Serb, Czech and Bulgar tenors and baritones.

Yet still the Laughing Cat went round, weary but briefly welcome at good theatres in every capital, and of this company Mark, at Erika's mediation, became the secretary. He had learned to speak French and German fluently in his wanderings, and someone was needed to conduct large correspondence in these languages about bookings, hotel reservations, the forwarding of scenery and such matters. He came to know again the excitable life of behind the scenes, the smell of greasepaint, the glare of dressing-rooms, the talk of drapes and tabs and limes and props. He visited nearly every country in Europe, save forbidden Russia itself. The troupers travelled by train: but he and Erika, in her white car, went by road and picnicked in German forests, on the slopes of Austrian mountains, on treeless Balkan plains, by French rivers, on the Italian coast.

Erika had joined the Laughing Cat three years before himself. At that time, as the romantic aura which once surrounded noble refugees had worn thin and even its patrons were tiring of the repertoire, which had not changed since 1919, the Laughing Cat seemed in danger of losing the last of its innumerable lives, and Erika was recruited to save the situation. She was known from the Danube to the Baltic, had a voice like a crow with croup, an eye which could impart a universe of double meaning to a line, and the finest legs in Europe. Her invigorating effect on tired

business men was stupendous. Her name on the bills, the songs she sang and the clothes she wore (as well as those she did not wear) saved the Laughing Cat.

When Mark arrived even Erika seemed unlikely to keep the Laughing Cat alive much longer. The day of its appeal was passing. Mark, however, proved useful in this matter. He wrote one or two sketches about the current times, which brought the Laughing Cat up to date. Erika persuaded the Odessan to try them; they were successful, and soon half the programme consisted of Mark's sketches; also Mark began to earn substantial sums and the idea of writing plays was born in him.

The life contained the things Mark needed to cure the ailments from which he suffered: movement, change and colour. He would have been fairly content but for Erika, whose particular fiend, the demon of possessiveness, snapped always at his heels.

She turned and looked at him now, with affectionate animosity in her strange eyes.

'Nun,' she said, 'of what are you thinking?'

'I was thinking of you, if you must know.'

'But that pleases me. *Du*, tell me more.'

Erika von Horst was the daughter of a German general. She had grown up in Schwerin when there was still a Grand Duke there. Her father was Court Chamberlain, and but for the war she might, like her mother and grandmother, have blossomed quietly in the shade of the Palace, married an officer, borne other officers, sometimes have been invited to the Kaiser's Court itself.

'Ach, it was so beautiful, a good time. Life was so safe, and everyone had his assured place in it. We were not rich, but we had enough, and we knew just how much we would be able to spend on clothes, how much on amusements, how much to put by for illness, how much to save. Everybody was like that, from the workman to the nobleman. I think that world has gone for ever. There was the theatre, with the Grand Duke in his box, and all the uniforms, white and gold, red and blue and green, and we girls, with mamma, in our prettiest frocks. I only went once, to a gala performance, I was too young. But my sisters told me all about it. Ach, thou, Mark, that was a lovely time. Then we had hope and a future. Sometimes we went to Berlin,

but papa did not like Berlin, he preferred Dresden. Our house was on the lake and sometimes we went boating. . . .’

Thus Erika, looking at her childhood from eyes beneath which her times had placed their heavy shadow. In the stormy years after the war, when old General von Horst was ruined by the inflation and died, leaving his widow and daughters penniless, she had gone to Berlin and on the stage; the public was titillated to hear a general’s daughter sing bawdy songs and to see her legs: it was still something novel in Germany.

Erika threw herself into this life with abandonment. The fashion demanded that girls of birth and breeding should surpass the public strumpets: then she would lead the fashion! Her love affairs were notorious and she was even suspected of liking women. She was married, but consistently refused to tell Mark anything about her husband.

‘Erika, why will you not hear of divorce? Finally, it would be better for all concerned.’

‘*Ach*, leave me in peace.’

‘I cannot understand you.’

‘*Du*, it is not necessary that you should understand. It is my affair. How does it concern you?’

‘Well, since you ask, I find that it does concern me. I do not care for married women.’

‘*Ach*, rubbish. I am not married, it is all over.’

‘Since you *are* still married, it is not all over; that is just the point.’

‘I have my reasons. I want my revenge.’

‘Ah, no, you can’t tell me that. If you want revenge, then you are in love with him. A woman does not seek revenge on a man whom she does not love.’

‘*Du*, you are a donkey. You know nothing of women, and again, nothing, my stupid one.’

‘Stupid, perhaps, but not thine.’

‘I’ll scratch your eyes out if you talk like that. . . .’

He came no further. She was hard and bitter, and sometimes as tender as a mother with a babe. In Hamburg Mark fell ill and from low health his wound opened and began to suppurate. She let the Laughing Cat go without her to its next engagement, so that she might tend him. She was an excellent cook and spent

hours preparing dishes to tempt him; and if he praised them enough became again a happy, laughing girl.

But her jealousy was akin to mania. Probably from an overdose of Prussian officer's blood she would, in her tantrums, stride up and down and shout as if Mark were a recruit on the barrack square. On several occasions this termagant gave exhibitions of jealousy which caused him to fear for her reason.

One day, in a café in Brussels, a woman of about forty, who sat alone, caught Mark's eye and smiled. He found something familiar in her face, and bowed. She beckoned. 'Erika, just a moment,' he said, 'I believe I know this lady,' and went over. She was a former chorus girl from Gailey's, now married and living in Brussels, who remembered him across the vale of twenty years. As they talked he gradually recalled pretty Sylvia Sylphleigh, and was happy to meet her again. When he went back Erika smiled gaily, said, 'Thou, look', and showed him some pictures of herself in a magazine.

Presently, they went home. He had quite forgotten Sylvia. As they entered the flat Erika slammed the door, turned the key and put it in her handbag, and shouted, 'Now, who was that woman'.

'Erika! What's wrong?'

'I demand to know who that woman was!'

'So! I answer no questions of thine while that door is locked.' And Mark took a paper, sat down and began to read. She snatched it from him. He lit a cigarette and moved it as she grabbed, so that she burned herself. She took a vase and threw it against the wall with an appalling crash. He grinned. She threw her handbag across the room. He laughed, but kept a wary eye for anything that might come in his direction. She ran to the door, unlocked it, flung it open and shouted, 'Get out then. Get out!'

He walked towards the door. As he stepped past it she flung it to again, so that it caught and gashed his cheek. Then he raised his hand to give her what she needed, but suddenly she was crying all over him and dabbing his cheek with a handkerchief, and then she strained herself to him with closed eyes, passionately, urgently. With difficulty he disengaged himself.

'And now that, of all things,' he said. 'My dear Erika, one

moment. Let me at least enjoy my headache for a while. Heaven, what are you, then, woman or vixen? I never know whether I am in Grand Guignol or Hagenbeck's Circus, with you. I think you are mad.'

'Quiet, quiet,' she said, pressing to him. 'I was excited. You should not torment me. Who was that woman?'

'An Englishwoman whom I knew when she was a girl, twenty years ago, in London.'

'Was there anything between you?'

'Nothing. Not even a kiss.'

'Forgive me. I could not bear to see you talking to her. It made me so nervous. But you love me, *nicht wahr?*'

'No, how often must I tell thee, no!'

'You swine!'

Now she sat opposite him, golden-haired and black-clad as always; grave, contemptuous, self-contained, mocking.

'Well, Erika. How was the new sketch then?'

'A bomb-hit. The public laughed itself sick. *Du*, you have talent in this. When will you write a play for me? I have good connections in Berlin, I can get it produced. Thou, I have a bear's appetite. Order something for me. It is beautiful here.'

Though this was only May, of 1935, the night was warm. He watched her. She was sometimes very beautiful. She was quiet awhile. Then, without looking at him, she spoke.

'Thou, Mark, shall I have myself divorced?'

'Erika! I have always advised you to get a divorce.'

'Ja, ja, I know what counsel you have always given me. But will you marry me?'

'*What?* Thou dear God, no! *Marry!* No!'

Now she turned, and looked malevolently and lovingly at him. 'Mark, am I so poor, so bad, so little?'

'No, that has nothing to do with it. But I will not marry, you know that. I have always told you so.'

'Ach, one says this and that. But why? Will you remain always a bachelor?'

Mark thought. Should he tell her? He and Erika had been long together. She had cared for him when he was ill, and of late had been sweet and placid. They had had grand times

together. And secrets kept overlong in the heart are like food stored too long; they go sour.

'Erika, I never told you that I am a bachelor.' (She stiffened and the grey eyes opened wide.) 'No, never once. Think. Your question was, "Are you married?" and I said "No".'

'You are divorced?'

'No.'

'Well, then . . . Ach, no. You are not a *widower*?'

'Yes.'

'But tell me, Mark.' She leant forward, elbows on table, eager curiosity in her eyes.

And so he told her, about Patrick and Sally, Roger and Patricia. She listened intently, never once taking her eyes from his, so that her food grew cold.

'Mein Gott,' she said, when he was finished, 'it was not your brother's child!'

'No. I had never suspected that. I have a numb spot somewhere in my brain, and I'm never on the look-out for trickery. I'm a fool. Anyway, I was.'

'Who was this, how is he called . . . Piecegood?'

'Ah, him. Yes, I know him. He was her chief, at the place where she worked. It must have been going on a long time. I remembered, when I found that letter, that she used to tell me, years before, that he was a devil. The dirty little cow. Ha!'

'Why do you laugh, then?'

'Oh, I was just thinking how Sally would have abused any woman who behaved like that in one of her *Pikchers*. "What an awful woman!" she would have said to me on the way home.'

'Mark, I don't want to hurt you, but I must ask: how was it with your little daughter?'

'No, I thought of that, of course, but that was all right. I worked that out. Besides, Patricia was very much like me.'

'So! *Ach Gott*, my heart turns when I listen. You have been through something, *du*. What did you do then?'

'I just sold everything and came abroad. I felt I never wanted to see England again. But there's a sequel, if you're so much interested, Erika' (she nodded vigorously), 'when I was in France I went to Amiens, where I was, with my brother, during the war. He had a girl there, I'd forgotten all about her. I ran

across her. She had a son. There was no mistake about *him*; he was my brother all over again. He was all right; his mother was happily married, to a good chap who knew all about my brother and accepted the situation. But can you imagine how I felt, Erika, standing by that child's bed? Ten years of my life thrown away, for the sake of another man's bastard who was supposed to be my brother's child . . . sometimes I'm sorry Sally's dead, so that I can't kill her. . . .'

'Ach, Mark, be quiet. You cannot say those years were "thrown away". There was your little daughter.'

'Yes, I know, but when I lost her and found out the truth about the boy, at one and the same time, it nearly finished me.'

'Mark, calm yourself. What can I say? I have gone hot and cold, listening. It is unbelievable that there should be such women. . . .'

'Oh, yes, of course, that's what the other women always say. Every one of them would do the same thing if they could find a fool ready to hand. . . .'

'Du, how come you to speak to me like that? Have I ever asked you for anything? What right have you to insult me because of this woman?'

'Well, if you don't like it you know what to do. All this began because you spoke of marriage, didn't it?'

'That was in jest. Forget it, if you will. But Mark, we have been together so long, how could you keep all this locked up in your heart.'

'Do you think I like talking about it? Perhaps it's better locked up in my heart; when I unlock it I feel I want to take vengeance on the nearest woman to hand. It makes me feel unclean, as if I were to blame. I don't know. I've thought and thought until my head has nearly burst, and I don't know the answer. Was I to blame, was she, what ought I to have done? I can't imagine my life without Patricia. Yet I should feel cleaner now if I had sent Sally away, that day she came to see me in hospital. God, I wish I'd got out of bed and throttled her. But why should I feel dirty? I don't know, but I do. . . .'

'Ach, stop, stop, stop! You speak like a silly child. You were unfortunate, but to reproach yourself, that is the greatest nonsense. . . .'

The lights were dwindling in Budapest as the white car came down the hill and crossed the bridge. She spoke only once. 'So *that* is the reason why you will not hear of marrying Erika,' she said.

CHAPTER 23

'MEALTIME, children.'

With this odd but immemorial German salutation General Petropavloff greeted the members of the Laughing Cat Company, assembled one fine summer's morning on the terrace of the Café Berlin; and 'Mealtime, Uncle', they answered in chorus. Mark and Erika were now veterans of the company, nearly all the other members having changed during the five years Mark had been with it. But old General Petropavloff loved them all: Erika the German and Mark the Englishman; Martha and Magda, the Hungarian dancing girls; Ivan, the gloomy Bulgar bass and his sad-eyed wife Nessa; Jan, the Czech tenor, and Bobbie the manager (for some reason the Odessan claimed that this unlikely name was his); they were all his children.

He looked at them fondly, the bearded old man who had once commanded an army. There was not a Russian among them, but he hardly remembered that. For him, they were still eternal Russia, these buskers; they still represented the comrades he had marched with, the women he had loved, the Czar he had served. They sang the songs and danced the dances, wore the peasant costumes and the tight-waisted, becartouched coats which he loved. The company was a little Russian island, still just big enough to stand on dryfoot; and when the waters receded it would swell again into the great Russia he had once known. . . .

'Mealtime, children,' he said, and they all smiled brightly back at him. He smiled down at them. Erika, as usual, was quarrelling with the wasp-tongued Martha and Magda, whom she always worsted, for she was quicker and more spiteful even than they.

'What a lovely frock, Fräulein Erika,' they said, 'did you get it from Wertheim's?' And Erika, who prided herself on her dress-maker, answered sweetly, 'No, dear Fräulein Martha, Wertheim's is for little Hungarian peasant girls, not for me.' 'Mein Gott,'

they said, bridling 'but that is friendly. We also call ourselves *von*,' and Erika retorted, 'Yes, ladies, I know you *call* yourselves *von*,' and Martha said, 'At least we still have our Court, in Hungary', and Erika replied, 'And *what* a Court! A comedy! Spare me the aristocratic reminiscences, Fraulein Martha. . . .'

'Now, now, children, children,' said General Petropavloff chidingly, 'are you at it again? Must you spoil the lovely morning?'

How jumpy they were, these little ones, he thought. They were always like this, now. Look at Ivan, glowering into his coffee as if the devil were in it, and his Niobe of a wife, Nessa. None could match her dazzling vivacity on the stage, but she never smiled off it, and for good reason; Ivan beat her continually, and her yells were known in every theatrical hotel from Riga to Rome. Look at Erika, a hand-grenade of a woman if ever there was one, liable to go off bang at any moment; always quarrelling with her Englishman and always refusing to let him out of her sight.

'Nun, Bobbie,' said the General, 'business is good, at all events. This Goebbels was in the house again last night.'

'Tcha,' said the Odessan, shrugging cynical shoulders, 'where there are a pair of legs like Erika's, the Goebbels will always be.'

Magda said loudly 'Rikki-tikki-tavvi'. That is, she said something in Hungarian, and anything said in Hungarian, a language understood by few people outside Hungary and by not many in that country, sounds like 'Rikki-tikki-tavvi'. Her colleagues of the Laughing Cat disliked to hear her and Martha speak Hungarian for they suspected (rightly) that something unflattering to one of themselves was usually being said.

'I suppose that is not anything suitable for polite society to hear?' asked Erika, with serpentine menace.

'Oh, but yes, Fräulein von Horst,' said Magda. 'I merely remarked that this little Goebbels has the reputation of being a connoisseur in legs.'

'Ah! And do you speak, perhaps, from personal experience, Fräulein Magda?'

'Children, please, I beg you.' And General Petropavloff interposed his beard between these eternally warring ladies like the prow of an icebreaker. 'Mein Gott, is there no peace left in the world?'

They thought him a pathetic old gentleman. They did not dream that in twenty years many of themselves might look as forlornly back at the past as he, think as longingly of the Europe they now lived in, and feel themselves as useless and unwanted. So far their imaginations would not reach. It was a sign of senility, they thought, to live in the past. Nevertheless, they were becoming very anxious about that future which would soon be their own past.

The Laughing Cat was falling on bad days, in 1937.

The romantic associations of a cabaret founded in the tragic last days of a world war lost their appeal now that a new war approached. Erika's songs, which were as the droolings of an aged trollope and for a while had served to titillate the aged, and corrupt the immature, were losing their vogue; and Mark had to work harder and harder to keep their programme fresh with new material.

But worse than all that, the unrest which was spreading through Europe repeatedly interfered with their business. They had had the bad luck to be in Vienna when the German Nazis murdered the Austrian Chancellor, and in Marseilles when the King of Yugoslavia was killed by some obscure scullion of the cooks who were brewing a new war; on both occasions they had played to empty houses and run very short of funds in consequence. Their journeys and bookings became difficult to plan. But still, bedraggled and weary, the Laughing Cat went its way; still the playgoers, each night, saw flashing eyes and dazzling teeth and fiery dances, heard wild music and melting songs, and thought affectionately of dear old Imperial Russia.

Oddly, their troubles were least in Berlin, which was the source of all their troubles. There, they needed only to dress the company in the uniforms of Prussian Grenadiers, play the music of Fridericus Rex, and send General Petropavloff on as Old Fritz, to be sure of wildly enthusiastic press notices ('These talented artists from pre-Bolshevist Russia') and full houses. Erika, as a Friderician ensign, doing the parade-step in tights at the head of the grenadiers, showed a zest for this scene which, Mark felt, could not be fully explained by the publicity which it gave to her delightful legs. Even Hitler came to see them in this act, and Mark, watching from the wings, saw him nod weighty approval

as Erika, throwing her pointed toes out before her like darts, marched off with her face upturned to his box and her saluting hand to her plumed tricorne hat.

'*Na*, children, and how goes it with you all?' asked General Petropavloff lovingly, as he sat down among them.

They looked the same people who had met for many years each morning at the Café Neapolitain in Paris, the Café Herrenhof in Vienna, or wherever they chanced to be, to talk about themselves in the delightful way of theatrical folk, who are the sanest of mankind and waste no time discussing the foreseeable fiascoes of public affairs. The women wore the best looks that money could buy; the men were slavonically blue-jowled; and all, realizing that the daytime world, too, is a stage, played their little parts for the benefit of any who might recognize them. On the table was their bible, the stage newspaper. At hand stood a waiter, listening for scraps of information valuable to The Party. Around were Germans, looking wistfully and aggrievedly for a world of foes to stare in the face.

'Thank you, Uncle, good,' they smiled, as he took the paper and began to expound his darling theory; that Bolshevism would collapse next week. But privily they were worried people. The world was going mad again, and what would happen to those happy-go-lucky people, the travelling artists, who ask so little from life and yet to live at all must be free to move about, when frontiers closed, and calling-up began again, and the theatre languished?

They were uneasy, for, like the scourging wind of the Faroes, that makes lonely men think the sheep talk to them, there was something in the air of this Germany that disquieted. Bobbie, who belonged to a race practised in such crises, had already prepared to put the closing prison, Europe, behind him. He had found a fellow-Odessan who was Honorary Consul, in Berlin, for Haiti, and by some means had acquired a full citizenship of that distant republic; his line of retreat was thus secure and he asked Mark where Haiti was.

But the others upon whom General Petropavloff looked were less ingenious and more uneasy. Travelling all over Europe, they saw the new storms that loomed up more clearly than those who stayed in their homes, and before them the mists gathered

over their own futures. Thoughts of success, stardom, wealth and happiness faded. And as they sat there, the living cause of all their fears paraded past the Café Berlin, under the lime trees. There was a clash of cymbals, rub-a-dub-dub, and tramp-tramp of marching men; beside the soldiers idiotic-looking civilians, grown men with solemn, stupid faces, kept step to the beat of the irresistible drum. They all stood up to look.

‘They march well, don’t they, Uncle?’

‘Ah, yes, Mark, the Germans can march, nobody can deny that. I remember, I was here in 1908 with the Czar. The Kaiser wanted to impress us, and he did! There was a review at Potsdam: I never saw such troops! And still we would have beaten them, but for the accursed Bolsheviki, these traitors.’

‘There will be war.’

Nessa said this, and they were surprised, firstly because she seldom spoke at all (fearing to irritate her Ivan) and secondly because thoughts like these were usually kept private in Germany.

She sat always among them like the mother of sorrows. She had Turkish blood, and had been brought up to the yashmak and the silken trousers. She was the cause of much girlish giggling between Martha and Magda because she shaved her body hair, all of it.

‘How?’ said Bobbie, uneasily.

‘Yes,’ said Nessa, ‘there will be war. You gentlemen, you talk much, but you say nothing. I do not understand that. I sit here and listen, and ask myself, why do they not say what is in their minds? I am from the Balkans, from a little town, Plovdiv, where the people are very simple, and very poor, but they do not waste words and they understand what is going on. The old men go in the evening to the cafés and talk together, and when they come home they tell their wives, there will be a murder in Serajevo soon, or a great war is coming. So it was when I was a little girl. My mother and I seldom went out, and when we did we wore the veil, but we knew these things from my father, and I think now the old men are saying, in the cafés, there will be war. But here, in your civilized Europe’ (Mark noticed that Nessa always distinguished between ‘the Balkans’ and ‘Europe’, just as many English people speak of England and Europe) ‘you talk and talk like children, and either you do not say what you mean,

or you do not see what is before your eyes. You, Herr Mark, you say, "They march well", and you, Uncle Peter, you say, "Yes, the Germans can march", but none of you say what is the truth, that there will be war and it will ruin us all. . . .'

Ivan turned to his wife. 'Shut your mouth,' he said briefly, 'gabbler.'

They were all silent for a while. Then Erika turned to Mark, 'What do you say to that?' she asked.

'I? Dear Erika, I should ask you. You know which country has the millions of soldiers. England will not begin a new war.'

'*Ach*, of course, always the other *begins* the wars.'

Outside, Unter den Linden, the sound of the band and the marching men dwindled, and soon Martha and Magda, who had been exchanging glances with two lusty young men in the black uniform of the SS., got up and went out, and the rest of them followed later.

Thus, as the end of the fateful nineteen-thirties approached, this small community of anxious people went its rounds among the great community of troubled people which was the population of Europe: many millions of adult human beings who waited like frightened sheep for some new calamity, they knew not what.

At the core of this little group of people were the two who had met in the Babylon Bar five years before: Mark and Erika. Several things kept this ill-matched pair together. Chief among them was the combustible stuff of physical desire, of which Mark had too large a balance left from his unslaked youth. Their relationship was strangely compounded of repulsion and attraction. There was always an atmosphere of suspended crisis between them, caused by her imperious and possessive nature. A wildcat was hidden behind her disdainful self-control, and if she had been some old-time Empress, with power to order men to torture, Mark would not have cared to be her prisoner. Once in Cracow a theatre-manager thought to enter her dressing-room without knocking, and to stay there; he reappeared suddenly with four bleeding streaks on either cheek and was thereafter the laughing-stock of the town.

With Mark she was more careful, now, though he always felt as if at any moment some furious conflict might blaze up between them. Her divorce was at last in preparation, but she showed

no anger at Mark's renewed refusals, expressed in blunt and even horrified terms, to marry her. She was a good comrade. He, who had never known the joy of being well looked after, found his every want cared for. She had a way with humble women, and attached laundresses and sempstresses to her everywhere, so that his wardrobe seemed always to be renewed by fairies in the night. He was flattered, too, by her desirability.

She had a reason, which he understood later, for so meekly suffering his invariable 'No', when she asked woman's eternal question, 'Do you love me?' and his frequent intimations that their relationship was terminable at any moment, without reproach. She was thirty; her titled-strumpet pose and act had lost their novelty; but she was resolved to cling to her place in her profession and wanted to get back to Berlin. To that end she coaxed and urged him in every way she could to press on with the play he was writing for her.

Mark worked hard at it, and was surprised by the woman who took shape in it. He felt like a painter who discovers, behind the well-disciplined features of a client, traits hidden from the world. He believed Erika's hardness to be but the counterfeit impress of the ill-treatment she had received from life. Yet the woman in his play was by original sin, by nature, a she-devil.

He might have been writing on a planchette, at the prompting of some occult influence, by the unexpected things this puppet Erika did.

'Thou, Erika, this bitch is getting on my nerves. The play is turning out quite differently from my intentions.'

'*Ach*, don't worry about that. Make me as bad as you like. I want it so.'

'I'm not sure if it will please you so well, when it's finished. You're known as a singer and cabaret artiste, and not least on account of your beautiful legs. This is growing into a part for a great tragic actress. A hag, this woman is.'

'All the better. That is the very kind of part I want to play. I am like that.'

'Nonsense, *du*. You're a girl from a better-class family who's been through a lot and is clever at getting risky lines across the footlights. I wanted to write a comedy for you.'

'Mark, you're an idiot. You've a wrong idea of me. I need a

part like *that*, to give myself completely. What I've done until now is rubbish. I *want* to act, and I can.'

'Look, Erika, an actress cannot change her type as she changes her costumes. It's one thing to sing "I'm made for love" and wink at the bald gentleman in the front row, and quite another to play the basest human passions in a convincing way. You need experience for that.'

'You donkey. What have I not experienced?'

'I don't mean that kind of experience, shameless one. What do you know of hatred and murder?'

'Of hatred? Enough. Of murder perhaps also, who knows?'

'*Ach*, you won't be serious. . . .'

Thus, out of the delicately-bred girl, hardened by her times and humorously battling with them, whom Mark meant to create, grew a virago, enemy of women and destroyer of men, whose weapons were envy, passion, avarice and hate, and as she took shape Erika clapped her hands.

'*Gott*, Mark, that is a part! That is a woman! She lives! The people will open their eyes when they see me in this part! I will show Berlin!'

'You have a funny opinion of your sex, Erika. This woman gives me the horrors.'

'No, no, you're wrong. A woman must be like that, ruthless, man-killing, like a leopardess. I hate the soft, silly creatures who call themselves women nowadays.'

'It's a good thing, at any rate, since you despise women, that you like men.'

'*Men!* I *despise* them. They are worse than women. But they are sometimes necessary to me.'

Mark was astonished by the sadistic hatred of all humankind which Erika sometimes revealed. The world seemed to be her enemy. *Schadenfreude*, a malicious joy in the misfortunes of others, was strong in her, and she showed it with envenomed glee when chance brought her close to a woman who briefly held the gaze of the world: Mrs. Simpson.

Mark, having come to hold a low opinion both of human wit and human loyalty, had not been much surprised when his fellow-countrymen at home, having promoted his contemporary, Prince Charming, to King Charming, after a brief period of even louder

adulation than before had dismissed and pilloried him because they did not like his wife-to-be; the nineteen-thirties, he thought, would not have been complete without that comedy. With the other members of the Laughing Cat Company, he had taken keen interest in this wonder of their times, from its first to its ninth day, and later was in Vienna when the Duke and Duchess of Windsor arrived there. The Odessan, who knew every head waiter west of Warsaw, heard that these two were to dine one evening at The Three Hussars and proposed that the whole company should go there. They all eagerly agreed, especially the women, and the occasion gave Erica an opportunity for a strange display of her she-cat-like nature.

The buskers gathered expectantly at their table, and presently the two came in, he who had thought a kingdom well lost for love, and she who had gained a duchessdom by it. He was still boyish-looking, even at close quarters, and she was the most demure of duchesses. Both seemed unaware of the glances of stupid curiosity which converged on them, from behind menus, round pillars, over shoulders. Mark alone, in that place, had a greater interest in them than inquisitiveness and, as a man who now thought himself a hardened cynic, was surprised to notice rather painful emotions, which he could not define, but which were somehow mixed with feelings, about England, which he thought he had outgrown. The sight of his contemporary — previously seen, through reverent boyish eyes, in France — awakened memories of Nelly Yeoman, devoutly reading *The Lady* and wishing 'that the Prince of Wales would marry'.

'Of course, it was impossible,' said General Petropavloff, on behalf of all Courts and all Royal Families, 'a divorced lady, however charming, could not be Queen of England.'

'Why not?' said Bobbie from Odessa, spreading his hands in protest and speaking for free democrats everywhere. 'There's no law against it.'

'Ah, there is an unwritten law in these things,' said General Petropavloff, looking with liege eyes into his memories of the Winter Palace. 'A king must not marry a divorced lady, far less one who is not of princely rank. What do you think, Mark?'

'Oh, I think you're right, General. If we're going to have Kings and Queens, and the century of the common man seems

"to show that we need more of them, not less, I expect certain rules ought to be kept. But I don't like the sudden change, in my country, from kow-towing worship of this gentleman, to prurient abuse."

"Why couldn't there have been a morganatic marriage. That's legal, isn't it?" (from the Haitian jurist).

"Oh, no, no. A King must be a king, and a Queen a queen" (this from the surprising Nessa, the Turco-Bulgar, who adores her Franco-German-Hungarian King Boris and his Italian-Montenegrin Queen, Joanna), "you cannot have a King with a private wife. It is not seemly."

General Petropavloff, wryly sipping his Viennese wine, appeals to Erika, counting on the fellow-feeling of the nobility.

"How does she please you, Fräulein Erika?"

"Very well. She looks good, for her age" (trust Erika) "and so does he. But for her, my highest esteem. It makes me really happy to think of the way she has snapped their king away from the old lords and ladies and the whole pack. A box on the ears, she has given the Court and society. I could laugh to burst myself, when I think of it."

"But Fräulein Erika, you are of the nobility yourself."

"Of the German, not the English. They deserve this disgrace, these stiffnecks. Mein Gott, how I am glad about it. They chased our Kaiser away, *nicht wahr*? Well, now they have chased their own King out. Mark, that is shameful for thy country."

"Dear Erika, you are wrong if you think that my fellow-countrymen are bowing their heads in shame about this. They see the guiding hand of the Almighty in it, as always, and have already forgotten their adored Prince. Why, even last Christmas the little boys were singing a song about it: "Hark the herald angels sing, Mrs. Simpson's pinched our King"."

"*Ach*, the English understand always how to hide their feelings. It is a gigantic show-up for you. Where is the great English monarchy now? I admire the woman."

"For aught I care, dear Erika, rejoice. None will take it ill of you."

Presently the Duke and Duchess of Windsor went their way, out into the Weihburggasse and the world, and the strolling players went theirs, Erika still rejoicing in the acquittal of the

score, against she knew not whom, which destiny had chosen Mrs. Simpson to pay off for her by proxy.

Soon after this, Mark's play was finished. It brought to a head the fears which had been festering in the breasts of the troupers. They had foreseen the break-up of the company, but put the thought of it from them as something that must happen one day, but not for a long time. They hated Mark's play because they knew that the company would disintegrate if Mark and Erika left. Murder was nearly done when Magda and Martha told Erika that the part was 'made for her'. It *had* been made for her; but she was not taking any such back-handed compliments from Martha and Magda and the men of the company had difficulty in keeping the three from each others' hair. Old General Petropavloff looked so gloomy when he read the play that Erika told him outright that his beloved company was doomed.

'Look you, Uncle Peter, whether I stay or go, the Laughing Cat is finished. Things are happening in Europe, and soon it will not be possible to run such a company as this. You should go to Paris, to America. Finally, you must have friends there yet, dear uncle. You are no longer young, and I do not think Europe will be the place for you.'

The old man winced. In 1919, when he had helped form this troupe, of which he was the last survivor, he had thought by means of it to tide over a bad time until he could return to Russia. For twenty years, travelling all over Europe, he had lived with his memories of the Court, of St. Petersburg, of his Anastasias and Sonias, of the ballet, of mad nights in garrison towns. He had never admitted that it was all finished; there was an interruption, but the resumption would come in his time. Now Erika pricked the bubble of his dreams, pronounced sentence of death on him. Not homecoming, but new wanderings; not restoration, but the loss of the one thing he had left; these she brutally tossed to him.

'So, indeed, gracious Fräulein von Horst,' he said, and Mark always remembered his dignity. 'Well, I *am* old; all men commit that crime. I will not go away now, if you permit. I have waited too long. I shall stay in Europe, and perhaps there will be a corner even for me.'

Mark's play travelled to Erika's 'good connections' in Berlin. After a silence of several months an offer to produce it came by

telegram, and Erika, who saw new theatrical heights within her reach, danced on the peaks of exaltation. The troupers were by now resigned to dispersal. Even in this twilight period, before Europe returned to open war, conditions were becoming too uncertain for such itinerants as they to count on their bookings or plan their journeys.

But the end came even before they were ready, in a sudden pandemonium of public and private strife from which a jury of the gods could not have disentangled what was tragic and what was comic.

They played in Vienna when the Germans invaded Austria. Though everybody had expected this event, it dumbfounded all. None could quite believe that such things happened in the twentieth century.

No theatres opened. The city was filled with a tumult as of ravening wolves and a silence as of sheep that feared even to bleat. Mark knew that night the atmosphere of a madhouse. With the General and Erika, he watched the endless, crashing parade of tanks and artillery, listened to the deafening din. All this was, to him, the first spot of blood on a murdered man's shirt, that would spread into a great red stain. Nauseated, he turned away, long after midnight, when Erika was still watching with parted lips and greedy eyes. Somebody's score was being paid off; she liked this.

Next morning they found that Bobbie had jumped the last train for Switzerland (and Haiti), taking the company's cash with him. They decided to wait a few days and see if a chance to reopen offered. On the morning of the third day Hitler came. Against the tranquil background of old Vienna, its hills and palaces, was gathered an enormous crowd, and from their hotel they saw this man come, drive slowly through the masses, and then appear on the balcony of the old Imperial Palace, opposite them. A vagrant in Vienna twenty-five years before, he now came, mightier than any Austrian Emperor.

Mark watched him, through Erika's glasses, in fascination. Hitler's face reminded him of a game which Nelly Yeoman had stealthily put in his stocking one far-off Christmas Eve: on a blank oval a little boy, blindfold, had pinned eyes, nose, mouth, moustache and hair, and then, untying the bandage, laughed

uproariously at the grotesque result. Hitler's nondescript, meaningless face vividly recalled those games. Mark could not read in it cruelty or benevolence, resolution or weakness, genius or stupidity: it was just nothing. Here, truly, was 'the common man'.

Whose agent is he really, Mark asked himself, as he looked at this Hitler in whose name the new war would be made and Europe carved up anew. For Mark had learned from Disraeli that 'the world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes'; and that meant that wars were made by very different personages from what was imagined by those who were not behind the scenes. The idiot-faced mob, on which Mark looked down, saw only this animated lay figure. But who pulled his strings, what was the real aim of the war which he, and other puppets in other countries, now joined to unloose? Its victims, Mark opined, would not be those against whom Hitler hoarsely declaimed. That was sales-talk for the multi-headed imbecile who stood, moron-faced, between himself and Hitler: the mob.

Across those myriad heads he gazed at the tiny, fist-beating, arm-waving figure on the balcony. A loud-speaker was fitted to a lamp-post beneath, so that it was as if a hundred Hitlers shouted their grating message into his very ear. After an hour of it Mark said to Erika, 'I've had enough,' and went to lie down.

It was abnormally hot for March. He did not know that on the glass-covered rear balcony which ran past his room, a naked woman with a python lay on a mattress. This was Cleo, The Lady Of The Snakes, who was billed as an Egyptian, though professional rumour said that she was the daughter of a Lascar sailorman who had met her mother in Marseilles nearly twenty years before. She liked to lay aside the artificial tan which she wore in winter for that of the sun when she could: and Cleo, stretched nude on a balcony, was a familiar first sign of spring in the theatrical hotels all over Europe.

Erika, who, with Mark, had often met Cleo on tour, detested her; like Sally, Erika easily found other women 'disgusting'. Cleo's figure was good; moreover, while Erika showed only her legs, Cleo danced unclothed save for some tapestry round her middle, while her pythons slid round her waist and neck, and

kissed her on the mouth (or appeared to do so). Mark and Erika had frequently seen Cleo's act.

Now the fortune of theatrical war had given Cleo the room next to Mark's, which was next to Erika's. He was lying on his bed, wishing he could shut out Hitler's shouting, when Erika came in.

'Well, you soon had enough of it!' she said.

'*Mein Gott*, yes,' said Mark, who could never learn caution, even with Erika, 'I couldn't stand that row any longer.'

'So! It is however not advisable to talk like that,' said Erika, and she walked to the window. Mark felt a sudden tension, opened his eyes, and saw Erika turning a face livid with fury towards him.

'So! *That* is why you don't want to listen to the Führer. You swine!'

'What the devil . . . '

'*Ach*, do not play the innocent. I have watched you ogling this woman long enough. I will show her,' and to Mark's amazement Erika clambered out of the window. He jumped up, looked out, and saw her advancing, with loud insult, upon Cleo. ('Plague take her,' he thought, 'where did *she* come from?') He saw Cleo calmly sit up; then, between them, he saw the python rear itself, grin and reach out a long neck (after all, its neck began where its tail ended, and who could say where that was) towards Erika.

Perhaps it wanted to kiss her; but Erika did not wait. Screaming, she flew back along the balcony and through the window again, popping her head out (when no python pursued her) to shout fresh abuse. Cleo made a subtle, though silent retort. Conscious that she had fulfilled the paramount rule of all warfare, which is, to cover your rear, she turned her own shapely and uncovered one with indolent grace towards Erika; who, being a student of the works of Goethe, was by this move so enraged that she seemed likely to face even the python, if she could but hurl Cleo from the balcony.

Looking over Erika's shoulder, Mark saw the heads of the General, Magda and Martha pop out of other windows, their faces at first round-eyed with alarm and then loosening into laughter. Erika's shouting drowned even Hitler's, which with

the help of the loud-speakers was still shivering the walls and windows of the hotel. As if the pandemonium were not already enough, cries and the sound of blows came from a room opposite Mark's; Ivan was not to be deterred by an invasion from beating his Nessa.

At last, with the help of Jan, Mark pulled Erika away from the window, pushed her into her own room and locked the door; only to hear the next moment still louder shrieks and a frantic hammering upon it. They rushed back and opened it. Erika fell out, nearly knocking them over and shouting, 'The snake!' They looked cautiously in. On her bed, wearing on its face the foolish smile of happy dreams, lay Cleo's other python (Erika never would close her windows). In the distance they heard Martha and Magda add their screeching to Erika's. Over all the tumult bellowed the voice of Hitler.

'What a day!' thought Mark, returning to his room. Cleo appeared at his window, paused shamelessly to blow him a kiss; and passed on: 'Go to the devil,' he called after her.

Then, gradually, the shouting died: Hitler departed; the pythons were restored to their baskets; Cleo put on clothes; in the lounge downstairs, Erika, seething, wondered how she could get at Cleo, just once, without her pythons; and peace returned, the uneasy, still vibrant, quivering peace that comes when the tolling of a great bell stops.

That was the end of the Laughing Cat. From rage, Erika feigned a heart attack and thoughts of reopening were abandoned. The next day, several of the players gave up hope and made for their homes. The troupe collapsed, leaving General Petropavloff alone in its ruins. They agreed that he should sell the scenery and costumes for what they would bring, and left him sadly preparing a retreat to Paris. 'I regret now, Mark,' he said, 'that I never learned to drive. Perhaps there is room for one more taxi-cab in Paris.'

And best of all would have been if Mark had made up his lazy mind and gone on his way alone from here, either eastward or westward. But his play held him to Erika. It was to be produced in the autumn and they had intended to go to Berlin in the summer. Well, they would go sooner.

So they packed their baggage and soon the musical call of the

white car was heard along the road still scarred by the tracks of Hitler's tanks. Ta-ra, ta-ra, it sounded; and by way of Munich and Leipzig, with many picnics and much fun on the way, they came, as the spring of 1938 began, to Berlin.

CHAPTER 24

IN September of 1938 Mark lay on the sands at Wannsee and studied with shamed distaste, in the *Nachtausgabe*, the picture of a Stiggins-like gentleman who had just arrived, with an umbrella, at Munich to see Hitler. Beside him lay Erika, slim in a white swimming suit and with a large leaf clipped to her nose to prevent it from becoming red; around them were thousands of Berliners, come out to the woods and lakes to enjoy the last fine days; on the water the rakish motor-cruisers, each with an obligatory swastika pennant, dashed about. The scene was a happy one of holiday-making, and the crowd good-humoured; but the fat men in bathing costumes who sat beneath Nazi flags planted in the sands read the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and there was in the air the truculent tension from which no man could escape in Germany.

Mark made a disparaging noise and Erika, rolling over to look at him, said, 'What is it then?'

'Oh, nothing,' he said, 'I was just looking at the pictures of this Chamberlain and thinking that my poor mother would certainly have called him A Fine Man.'

'So he is a fine man,' said Erika sharply, 'he pays our Führer befitting respect and I think he will see we Germans get our rights.'

'No doubt he appeals to you, Erika. He would. There is in England so much good and so much bad. This old goat represents all the bad; the cant, humbug, mockholiness and ignorance.'

'Mark, how often must I tell you to be careful. We are not alone here.'

'What of it? You may keep your mouth shut if it pleases you, you are a German. Let me speak my mind for once. This man, and thy Führer, are everything I detest.'

'I thought you wanted to forget England.'

'I did. This man makes me remember that I am an Englishman, and makes me ashamed of it.'

'Thou, Mark, I beg you, be careful. . . .'

When they drove back along the pleasant Avus motor-road that night, to Berlin, Mr. Chamberlain's work was complete, and happy German crowds in the Kurfuerstendamm were drinking his health. At home in England Mr. Chamberlain was proclaiming that he had saved both peace and honour; here in Berlin Mark saw he had made the new war certain, and that its moment approached. . . .

It had been a fantastic summer, since he and Erika had watched the invasion of Austria. He had felt all through those months that he and his play were running a race with war. Well, he had won. A week before this crisis his play had been produced in Berlin, and was now being performed to full houses. It was a great success; Mark Yeoman had achieved something at last. Looking at the fevered state of Germany around him, that night, he wondered if it had been worth the trouble.

He drove Erika to the theatre, and went up to the back of the gallery to watch the play. He saw it nearly every night, and had an eerie feeling as he watched, far below, these puppets he had made. In her big scene, particularly, Erika enthralled him.

From a stranger, some Scultze or Meyer who happened to stand beside him in the gallery one night, he had learned that she was generally held to have murdered a man! This was a famous theatrical producer, one Max Zeigem, who had been among her lovers, with whom she was known repeatedly to have quarrelled about other women, and who had not come back from a walk in the Austrian mountains with her during a holiday. He had been found lying at the foot of a wall of rock, and no taint of official suspicion had ever attached to Fräulein von Horst. But the public mind believed she had pushed him over the edge.

Mark subsequently found that, like the cuckold husband, he had apparently been the only man in Berlin who did not know of this episode. In the big scene in his play, the central character, a woman of many lovers, took vengeance on one who discarded her by pushing him from a balcony. The suggestion had been

Erika's! He shuddered when he thought how often he had stood beside her at an open window, and was astonished to find that he felt no particular horror of Erika, even now. When he asked her about the shadowy Zeigem she merely laughed, telling him that if he insisted on 'digging up her past' he would certainly find 'many male corpses' there, and urging him, if he believed that she had done what the public tongue attributed to her, to treat her better in future, so that she might not be tempted to do the same to him!

No man who ever wrote a play, he thought, as he watched Erika feigning reconciliation with her former lover, and then pushing him with all her strength as he looked down at the sleeping city, could have been put in a stranger situation. He did not know whether he had written a good play or whether the people merely came to see Erika shamelessly throwing her affair with Zeigem in their faces.

Erika would not even take him seriously, when he asked her about it. She thrived on her notoriety, and when he turned to look at the zestful and charming woman who sat beside him in the white car, or preened herself under the curious looks which were directed at her in restaurants, he asked himself if he were mad to suspect her of such a thing.

But as the invasion of Prague came, and the fear-laden summer of 1939, Mark's long interlude with Erika at last drew to its end. Berlin was intolerable. It was like a bar where many men have drunk too much and at any moment will become violent. Everywhere overloud voices, boasting, bragging, chest-throwing and coat-trailing. The atmosphere of repressed hysteria became stifling, and the antennae of Mark's sixth sense told him that the cauldron was meant to boil over very soon.

He had left England, eleven years before, intending never to return, hoping never to see again places which held only bitter memories for him. But if England, twenty years after victory in a world war, was to be destroyed, through wanton unreadiness, then he must be in England. He was impatient to be away from Erika, who was already beginning to show marked symptoms of the patriotic mania which made life in Germany intolerable for a foreigner.

Now that he wanted to go back to England, fortune played a

joke on him. Mark, who for so long had owned little more than the shirt on his back, found himself the slave of his possessions. He had accumulated, in fees and royalties, nearly three thousand pounds, in a Berlin bank. No money had ever been harder earned, but its transfer to England was forbidden. He hated to lose it, and all through that fateful summer delayed his going, hoping that some way would offer to remove it.

But when Hitler began to rave about the Poles, in August, he made up his mind to go if it cost him every penny he owned in the world. Nothing mattered any longer, except to get out of Germany; he did not want to spend years in internment.

Erika fought a great battle to keep him. They talked in her dressing-room. She sat before the mirror removing her make-up, and the eyes reflected in it intently watched him as he spoke.

'Du, Erika, I am going away.'

The towel in her hand dropped and two heads turned swiftly towards him, hers and the one in the mirror. 'Mark, are you going to start this nonsense again. You are *not* going.'

'It's no nonsense. I've no more time to lose. War is coming and I am not going to be caught here.'

'I tell you, there will be no war, stupid one. There will be a little crisis every six months, until our Führer has what he wants and Germany has its rightful place in Europe, and then all will be well.'

'Don't waste words, Erika. There will be war.'

'Then stay here. Nothing will happen to you. Let there be war! You have done your share, here none will harm you. With me you are safe. They might intern you for a few days, but I have good connections, and I will soon have you out. Then we shall have a fine life: you will write plays and I will act in them.' She came and strained herself to him, so that the blue-shaded eyes and the dipped-in-the-inkpot lashes were near his. 'We will let the storm pass over us. What does it matter to us, if we are together?'

'Erika, I am going, at once. This is the end.'

With a movement that made him reel she tore away from him, storming. 'Then you want it so. You don't *want* to stay with me. You are running away from *me*, not from Germany, or the danger of war. And I have given you my best years.'

'*Ach*, spare me that at least, Erika. The years a woman spends with a man, for her own ends and enjoyment, are always "her best". And she always "gives" them. I have "given" you just as many years, and they were my best. We are quits, and I am going.'

'Then go, you swine. Go, and if you can, take your money with you, the money I earned for you.'

'You? Erika, if you *had* earned money for me, I'd throw it away, for I think there is something unclean in you.'

'*Du!* Watch yourself! I am not to be spoken to like that!'

'Why not? I shall not stand on any balcony beside you, dear Erika. . . .'

She came at him with her hands shaped like talons, and he stopped her with a blow on the shoulder which laid her flat: he had thought out this situation in advance. She watched him from the floor with hatred as he went out.

But next morning, early, as he packed, his bell rang, and she was at his door, sad and meek.

'Mark, I am sorry. I want to make good what I said last night. Finally, after all these years . . .'

She made sure that his mind could not be changed, and then spoke of his money.

'But Mark, all that money. You can't leave it here.'

'I'll have to I know an Englishman who stored his canoe with a boatman on the lakes, when he left Berlin in 1914, and when he came back in 1920 it was there waiting for him.'

'That will not be so this time. Mark, I know, transfer it to me. I'll look after it for you. It will be safer in my name, they'll confiscate all foreign money.'

'No, I'll leave it in my name, Erika. They may keep it for me. When Germany sees that the war is lost, your friends over here will fall over themselves to make a good impression on the damned Engländer, anyway.'

She thought, and said, 'Look, Mark, I have an idea. It is monstrous that you should lose all this money. Buy jewels. Nobody can forbid you to take personal jewellery. Such things always keep their value. You can sell them in England without much loss.'

'*Du*, Erika, but that is an idea! You have a good head!'

In spite of Mr. Jack Saffron's advice, so many years before, Mark had never thought of this simple expedient.

She went with him from jeweller to jeweller; she knew about such baubles. He bought diamond rings, gold cigarette cases, unset diamonds, and much more, until the bulk of his money was spent. He did all this without realizing that he played the very scene he had written for her: the one where she feigned acceptance of her dismissal with vengeance in her heart.

They dined together for the last time, at Traube's, among Germans who seemed as if they would burst if they did not get their war soon. Afterwards they walked to her flat and the Kurfuerstendamm was athrong and ablaze with lights. The storm was about to break, not even Erika could doubt it. The uniforms, the crowds around the newspaper vendors, the people listening to the loud-speakers in the cafés, all told the same tale. The many-headed moron, the mob, prepared for another orgy of self-mutilation. Snatches of conversation came to them from the people as they passed: the Führer, Poland, England; England, Poland, the Führer. The night was warm, but Mark shivered. All his life, he thought, he had walked through this dark avenue of human folly, the air about him always filled with the noise of yesterday's war, or to-day's, or to-morrow's. In August 1914 he had seen the mob in London; this time he saw it in Berlin.

They talked far into the night.

'*Du*,' she said, 'must it really be?'

'Erika,' he said, 'it must be, and even without this war, it would have been. You are not for me, nor I for you. We have been too long together. Perhaps, if I had met you earlier, who knows? But there were already too many pages in the book of thy life, and of mine, before I knew thee.'

'What matters that?' she said, 'I cannot picture myself without you. I thought we would be always together. . . .'

'I never gave you cause to think it. Be reasonable.'

'I am not interested in reason, I want you to stay. And whether you gave me cause or not, it was my plan, and I built on it, beautiful castles in the air. You would have become great and famous, with me, and I, with you. You have taken my pretty dreams from me. But you will regret it. *Ach, du!*'

From the tears Erika shed that night Mark might have believed

she loved him as he understood love; that is, with a feeling in which, whatever happened, malice and vengeance could have no room. Next morning she saw him off. It was September 2nd and the train was packed with anxious Britishers and their families. As it moved out Mark leaned down to kiss Erika's hand and she called up, 'Auf wiedersehen, du'.

Slowly that fear-filled train moved westward, and at last came to Aachen. The frontiers were still open, still the guns were silent, safety lay in sight. The Englishmen breathed more easily, their wives looked with less anxiety towards their romping children. Mark felt a weight falling from his spirit of which he had been almost unaware: the feeling of oppression which the life of a foreigner in Germany induced. He looked down the line. How good it would be to be in France!

Along the corridor, demanding passports with refrigerated German politeness, came a police captain.

'You are Mr. Jomann?'

'Yes.'

'Come with me, please.'

'Why?'

'I have questions to ask you. Please.'

'Shall I have time to rejoin this train. It is most important.'

'Regret, I cannot say. You must come with me, please.'

Behind Mark, the train chugged away. Would there be another? Was he to be caught like this, on the threshold of freedom?

'Mr. Jomann, a charge has been laid against you by a Fräulein von Horst. We have a telephone message from Berlin to the effect that you are carrying with you property belonging to her. Have you these articles?' He handed Mark a complete list of the things he had bought the day before.

'Yes, I have all these things. But what is this nonsense? They are mine. I have the invoices in my pocket.'

The policeman looked puzzled. 'So! That is curious. It is improbable that a well-known person like Fräulein von Horst would raise a false charge. Where are the invoices?' (Mark produced them.) 'Um. That is right.' (He compared them item for item with his list.) 'Well, in that case all you need do is to return to Berlin and disprove Fräulein von Horst's statement.

But you have made yourself liable to another charge, in any case. All these articles were bought yesterday. It is a clear attempt to evade the currency regulations. You are smuggling money out of the country, Mr. Jomann.'

'I have a perfect right to personal jewellery, whether it was bought yesterday or last year.'

'You must convince the judge of that. I shall impound these articles until the matter is cleared up. You will return to Berlin with me.'

If Mark could have got his hands round Erika's throat then he would have taught her the lesson she needed. She meant to get him back to Berlin and had found a way. He would be caught there. He remembered her 'Auf wiedersehen' and mocking smile.

'Herr Captain,' he said, 'you know that this is not a time for an Englishman to stay here. I wish to leave. You may impound my property and I will return to claim it when times are quieter. You have no right to keep me here on a false charge.'

'Regret, Herr, I have no power to allow you to leave.'

Mark could not move him, and sat, raging, in his office until another train from Berlin drew up outside, with another cargo of worried foreigners. Grim pictures of years in a prison camp filled his mind.

At the last moment luck befriended him. The British Consul, who was travelling in it, came in. Mark leaped at him, and this good man, who knew his Germans, proved a wily advocate. While the train waited, puffing, the little room resounded with tributes of mutual respect, expressions of indignation and the click of heels.

'But, Herr Captain, you are a man of the world . . . a jealous woman . . . it is unheard of to keep Mr. Yeoman here. . . .'

'Regret, Herr Konsul, it causes me much pain, perhaps it is as you say (mein Gott, women!) . . . but my orders . . .'

'Finally, Herr Captain, a German officer knows always how to *interpret* his orders. . . .'

'But even so, Herr Konsul, Mr. Yeoman has committed an offence against the currency regulations. . . .'

'I know you have the highest German respect for your duty, Herr Captain, but then again, German chivalry . . .'

'Ah, you know our weak point, Herr Konsul . . . Very well,

then, but Mr. Jomann must leave his, er, jewellery and return to clear the matter up at the first opportunity.'

'Naturally, I will return.'

'When, Mr. Jomann?'

'Well, let us say, after the war, Herr Captain?'

A guarded German grin. As the train crossed the frontier, Mark Yeoman, nearly as poor as on the day he came, many years before, exhaled happily. He was well out of that. He felt lucky that Erika had left him a shirt to come away with. He was happy that she did not know that he had a good English hundred-pound note stitched into it, or she would have robbed him of that, too.

When he thought of the years in internment that Erika would have condemned him to, Erika whose comrade he had been for seven years, incredulous anger rose in him, and, once again, he found himself clenching his fingers, in imagination, around a woman's throat. But after a little reflection he fought down that feeling. It would be too much of a coincidence if he, Mark Yeoman, met only treacherous women. The fault must lie in himself. He could not see how, but it must. Until a few hours before he would have said that if there was one man in the world whom no woman could trick, that man's name was Mark Yeoman. But how nearly Erika had paid off, on his person, another instalment of the score she seemed to owe against all mankind. After all, a prison camp was no joke. If only he could get at Erika, just for a moment. . . .

Then, as he stood in the corridor of the train, watching the sad landscape of France move past, this mood fell from him. After all, he had beaten her; she had neither him nor his money, and he was free.

CHAPTER 25

THE casual young clerk in the British Consulate looked curiously at Mark. 'Oh, er, no, I don't think there's any particular call for people,' he said, 'I could take your name and address. . . .'

'Thanks, don't bother if it's like that.'

Mark wandered idly towards the Opera, telling himself that either everybody else was mad, or he was himself. If mankind

were mad, the Germans were least mad of all, for they at least knew what they wanted.

He was still in Paris. He had halted there, to watch events. But France, and the news from England, alike appalled him. He had come from Germany filled with awe of the military might of that country, but glad that at last his own country and its ally had risen to face an ordeal which they had been too lazy to avert. He had come expecting to see 1939 looking like 1918. He found the same uniforms, French and sometimes British, but none of the old ardour. He found only a listless disinterest.

It was gruesome. Mark remembered his leave of 1918, his cheery friends, the girl in the Avenue Wagram; and shivered in this mournful Paris. It was as lovely as ever, but pale and sorrowful, like a widow; and the spectral blue lighting at night suggested the tomb.

Perhaps the unconscious wish to see how this madness would end kept Mark in Paris. He took a cheap room on the Left Bank and began to write a new play. Having little money, he ate meagrely, and when his pen was stubborn wandered about the Latin Quarter or sat in the Rotonde. He was very much alone.

But when the spring of 1940 came, the lovely Parisian spring, it was so much overshadowed by the menace which he alone seemed to feel, that he suddenly realized he could stand Paris no longer. One day in May he paid his rent, and took a train to Amiens. Before he left France he wanted, if he could, to see Pierre again.

Madeleine and her Armand (who received Mark with dignity) were still at the Moulin d'Or. She was fat now, pretty Madeleine, and presided with spreading dignity over her dining-room. A young French officer was with them: Sous Lieutenant Pierre Legros. They made him greatly welcome, and Madeleine plied him with voluble questions about his far-off quest for Jeanne.

'Ah, Armand, is it not sad? I had so hoped that the little Jeanne would be found.'

'My dear, it is war.'

'Ah, oui, war, war, war, and now we have another war. That the good God permits it. . . .'

Pierre, a tall, slim, dark young man, on leave from the Maginot Line, was Patrick without Patrick's laughter; serious and reserved.

Mark found such difficulty in drawing him out that he asked Armand and Madeleine if he might invite Pierre out to dinner. They cordially agreed, and Mark took him to a restaurant. He ordered the meal, and looked across the table with a smile which the young man did not return.

'Pierre, how old are you?'

'Twenty-three, monsieur.'

'Will you, perhaps, not call me monsieur? I should like to feel that I am your uncle; but for the fortune of war I might have been. Please call me Mark.'

'Then, if you wish it, monsieur, Mark.'

'Pierre, you will not understand the feelings with which I look at you. You are very much like your father: and he was my brother, I grew up with him, was with him when he was killed, not far from here. He was twenty-three then.'

'Yes, I know it. Perhaps I shall be killed at the same age.'

'You would have been very proud of him, if he had lived. I loved him deeply. I have this feeling for you. But you have a resentment in you. . . .'

'Ah, no, no, I know what you mean, but it is not against you, or him. It is against life.'

'I have seen that in you, Pierre, and it has puzzled me. You are so much like your father, to look at, and yet so different. I remember him here in Amiens, just before he was killed. He was so gay. Nothing oppressed him. You are so grave, do you fear death? Your father and I both had that fear, and wanted to live, but it did not make us gloomy.'

'Ah, the fear of death cannot make a man as bitter as I feel, monsieur Mark. I think the difference between my father and me is possibly that he believed in life, and I do not. . . .'

'In life?'

'Yes. I do not want to die, but that would not depress me. It is the thought of the life which awaits me here in France, if I live, which embitters me. I am young, I want to marry, to have children, to make a career. What prospect is there of that? The future of France offers no hope for me. We are being sold.'

'Sold?'

'*Oui*, sold. See then, monsieur Mark, that is all nonsense, that we can lie down in the Maginot Line until we are ready to eat

up the Germans. I come from the Maginot Line. There are places where the Germans can walk through. Nothing is being done to close them, either by the French or the English. You read no word about that in the newspapers! There is treachery here. We are not allowed to do the things that should be done. How can the soldiers be expected to give their lives, when they know what goes on? They say, "We are to be sold".'

'But, Pierre, what object could anyone have?'

'Only the destruction of France, monsieur Mark.'

'But *who*? *Why*?'

'Ah, that I cannot say. I can only say what I *know*, and I have told you it. Some hand is in this. Then, consider our men. In 1936, you must know, this Blum allowed "soldiers' committees" to be set up in the French Army. How can an army be kept disciplined when the men sit and discuss whether they will fight or not? I know these rascals, they are Communists. They mutter that this is an "imperialist" war and not worth fighting. I place no trust in them, if the Germans should attack. If Russia were in the war they would be clamouring for every German to be killed. These men are traitors. Between them, in the ranks, and the other traitors, in high places, who are keeping the Maginot Line open, they will sell the pass. You will see.'

'Pierre, you alarm me. There is something here in France which I do not like, I admit it. I have noticed it myself, a disquiet that infects. Promise me one thing. I am going to England. Whatever happens, will you write to me regularly and let me know where you are and how you fare?'

'Most willingly, monsieur Mark.'

On May 10th a telegram suddenly recalled Pierre. Mark watched his brother's son go. Soldiers were marching through the streets with dull, indifferent faces; on the pavements the townsfolk cheered and shouted, 'On les aura!' Armand looked contemptuously at them.

'Well, monsieur Mark,' he said that evening, when they heard on the radio of the German attack, 'now we have it. I think you should lose no time.'

'Ah, God.' Madeleine wept, and Armand put his arm round her shoulder. Mark, still hoping for news of a French or British recovery, bought a bicycle (none but military trains were

running) and waited for four more days. Then came the news of the fall of Sedan. He said good-bye, mounted his bicycle, and rode towards Dieppe.

The roads were thick with refugees; he might as well have walked. Their motor-cars, with mattresses tied to the roofs, crawled along, intermingled with lorries, tenders and horse-drawn wagons. They fled, these unhappy people, they knew not whither. They still thought the line would hold somewhere, and they would be able to pitch their tents on the safe side of it. Mark, by this time, saw that unless they could cross the sea they had better stayed where they were. He saw Pierre's words made true; France was betrayed.

Near Neufchatel there was a roar, and Mark's imagination leaped back twenty-four years as he saw black crosses above him. Machine-gun bullets raked the miserable column, killing several people. They hit a young girl, too, so that the blood spurted from her leg. Her relatives tried childishly to stanch it with handkerchiefs, fearfully looking upwards over their shoulders for another attack.

'For the love of God, messieurs, mesdames, let me come,' Mark said roughly, and they made way, startled. He made a tourniquet with his handkerchief and stopped the bleeding, explained what they should do if it began again, and left her, murmuring 'Merci, monsieur, merci'.

Then, as he dismounted to wait while a long train lumbered at right angles across the road they followed, he saw Jeanne. An endless train it was, with people on the roof and the footboards, people crammed so closely in the compartments and corridors that the wonder was, how they ever got in or would get out. To have sought a familiar face in that jumbled mass of humanity would have been an almost hopeless quest: but Jeanne might have been alone in the train, so unerringly did Mark's eyes pick her out.

It was a great shock. She stood pressed against a window, looking out and seeing nothing, a middle-aged peasant woman with a careworn, sombre gaze, but unmistakably Jeanne. She passed, was nearly gone, when some instinct drew her eyes to his, and just as the picture faded he thought he saw her lips form his name: 'Mark!'

It is hard for a man to know himself, and only when he saw Jeanne did Mark suddenly, vividly realize that he was no longer young Mark Yeoman, but that she, too, must have seen a human being marked by years and embitterment. On the loom of his memory hung a fragment, begun and left there twenty-four years before, and in all that time he had unconsciously, unquestioningly thought that it might be taken up one day and begun again, where it was left off. Now he saw that it could never be resumed. The yarn of time had been used to make other patterns: the colours could not be matched anew.

His story and Jeanne's must remain for ever an unfinished melody to which, after a long pause, destiny's hand added this melancholy and incomprehensible final chord: the meeting at the crossroads.

Mark stood, looking after the receding train. With Jeanne, it carried his youth into the mists of France. . . .

For three days he waited, with many others, on the quayside at Dieppe. Just before he sailed, crammed against the rusty plates of a little cargo steamer, drenched by the waves that swept its decks, he heard that the Germans were in Amiens; a few hours more, and they would reach the coast. His heart sank at the thought of the British Army. How could it escape when the salvation of England itself seemed beyond hope, now?

Around him, near and far, east and west, other steamers, large and small, pointed towards that island. The chicks scampered before the storm, made for the protecting wing of Mother England. The ditch they crossed seemed pitifully narrow, the dull grey sea indifferent and hostile, the destroyers ludicrously small and few compared with the roaring menace that snapped at their heels.

Gradually England detached itself from the grey clouds and driving rain and took firm shape before them, the shape that had quickened the beat of so many homecomers' hearts through centuries past. Mark, steadying himself against the rolling of the ship, saw over the pitching bows the home and haunts of his boyhood: Brighton, the cleft in the cliffs at Rottingdean, where Sally had fallen into the sea, Beachy Head, all the familiar landmarks. . . .

They docked at Newhaven. After many years Mark Yeoman came home.

WHILE the collier *Janet Smith* of Newcastle, heavy as a woman with child, laboured seaward from Portsmouth in the teeth of a full gale and the dark hump of the Isle of Wight fell away astern, Mark Yeoman stood at a gun and wondered what ailed him. He had a fierce pain in the side, everything danced and blurred before his eyes, and he sweated inside his hooded duffel coat. It was a bad beginning to his seagoing career, he thought.

He had landed in England expecting to find the island ant-like with preparations against invasion, and instead he discovered a nightmare of unreadiness worse than the one of listless indifference he had lived through in Paris. Golfers ambled after little balls, holidaymakers lay about on the sands, children played, uniforms were rare and the men who wore them obviously untrained. Only the weakened British Navy guarded immense stretches of open coast: great areas of moor and meadowland beckoned to troop-carrying aeroplanes. Presently the British Army arrived, all its arms and equipment lost in France, and dispersed over a yawning countryside. The few machines of the Royal Air Force flew over a land in which people still thought chiefly of Tea, The Pictures, The Hippodrome, and The Local. Mark, in later years, would never be able to listen without amazement to people who recalled with affection 'the spirit of Dunkirk'; his own eyes saw the picture of childish unpreparedness which his native island offered in those days, and he was convinced that if a German landing had been made at that time, the invading troops would quickly have conquered the entire country.

The picture he saw was appalling. Like a man climbing to the topmost pinnacle of a rock around which waves are rising, Mark fled from it to an Englishman's last refuge in a drowning world: the British Navy. He had learned, on the voyage from Dieppe, that a man of his age might be accepted as a gunner on a merchant ship, and when he landed went straight to Plymouth.

The doctor looked doubtfully at the entry against 'date of birth'. 'Um,' he said, 'it's a pretty rough job. Why do you want to do this?'

'Well, I've wanted to run away to sea for thirty-five years,' said Mark, 'and this seems a good chance.' The doctor grinned

and passed him, and now, after three months' training, Mark made his first trip as naval gunner on the *Janet Smith*, in convoy.

It was September 1940, and invasion, men thought, must come any day now. With Mark, three other men in duffel coats leaned against the howling wind. They called him Uncle: young Sean O'Sullivan, a medical student from Dublin, young Jock Ferguson, an undersized, wiry Glasgow slummy who told lurid tales of the razor gangs, and young Ivor Caernarvon Griffiths, an American of interminable but repetitive profanity who had broken off a visit to the land of his fathers to fight 'that effing Hitler'. These three, however, showed much more zest in their private war with Mark, to whom they tirelessly explained their contempt for the country they had come to defend, than in the larger conflict. England, not Germany, was the target of their taunts. As the *Janet Smith* took the shock of the gale, so that one moment they saw twenty ships around them and the next were alone in a grey-green and spummy trough, they jointly sought to lower England's flag by making Mark sick (whose first trip this was, while they had sailed before).

'Are ye no cold, Uncle? Wad ye no like tae go doon to the engine room and get warm?'

'Thanks, Jock, I'm used to the cold. You Scotties are a delicate lot, you go down. I wouldn't like you to catch cold.'

'Aw, I'll hae ye know there isna a hardier mob in the world than we fra Glasgae.'

'Only heroes can live there, eh?'

'That's whaur the heroes come fra, Ah'm tellin' ye. Where wad the British Empire be wi'oot the lads fra Scotlan?'

'We might have got through without Ramsay MacDonald, Jock.'

'Aw, ye talk big, but ye don't luk sae gud.'

Mark felt awful, but hoped that the gale would blow away whatever ailed him. All day long they toiled up Channel, the *Janet Smith* shuddering violently as her racing screw lifted clear, reeling under the thudding seas as she fell back. Flap-flap-flapping lines; slithery decks and streaming scuppers; slap-thump-slam-bump against the sides; Mark, if he had felt better, would have loved them all, for these were his native waters and native winds, the same he had known as a boy.

The sense of drama, of pursuit and imminent calamity, was gone from him, now that he sailed the little ditch between his own country and the mainland. In the company of these three others, the feeling he had had in France, of being part of a stupendous human tragedy, died like an anaesthetized pain. They were just men in a ship, doing a dull job, thinking chiefly of their watch below, rations, shore leave. The odd thing about them, to Mark, was that, as he clearly saw, they would not take even defeat seriously, should it come. Was that why it would not come? He could not see the logic of the argument.

Into the dusk they staggered, and then into the howling, mine-strewn darkness, in which they must trust to providence alone that the other ships of the unlighted convoy would keep position, for a collision in this black and shrieking waste would be final disaster.

'Hey, look at that effing destroyer! I could have spat into the effing thing.'

But good Captain Foswick's wary eyes, though he used spectacles to read the sheaves of signals from the Commodore, had seen it. Above them, from the bridge, his warning boomed in the din, and the dim, menacing shape sheered off.

'Waal, of all the effing tricks to play. This would be a fine night to fall into the effing drink. Why, what's the matter with that effing Scotsman?'

Mark saw, in the darkness, that Jock leaned limply over the side.

'What's wrong, Jock, are ye no feeling sae well? Let me take your watch while you go and get warm in the engine-room.'

'Aw, tae hell wi ye, ye bliddy Englishman.'

'An effing fine sailor you are, Jock. Come on, Ireland, come and redeem Scotland's shame.' O'Sullivan reeled up out of the darkness, from his watch below.

'What's wrong? Glory be! You should have stayed in your wee hoose, Jock. That's what comes when the likes of us poke our noses into England's wars.'

'Ireland hasn't poked her effing nose very far into this war.'

'And praise be. Ireland's the only country in the world with a real statesman to lead her. De Valera will keep old Ireland out of this. If the other countries had such a man, there wouldn't have been a war.'

'Say, why are you in the effing Royal Navy, anyway?'

'Why shouldn't I be, me smalltown boy? Haven't the Irish always run the British Navy and the British Army? Don't the Irish run America? Holy Mother of God, what a night!'

When dawn came Griffiths was even limper than Jock, and Mark could hardly stand, though he was not ill from the sea. The wind brushed the clouds from the sky, and the sun came up, and ahead of them lay wrecks: the smooth and glinting hump of the Goodwins lurked among the tumbling waters like the back of a half-submerged monster. Destroyers snapped like sheepdogs about the untidy convoy, scattered during the night.

'Come on, Griffiths and Jock, bacon and eggs waiting below. . . .'

'Aw, can that effing stuff. . . .'

As O'Sullivan grinned, agitated signals flickered from a destroyer, and then flashes, and the four of them sprang to their guns. With a roar three dark shapes fell on them out of the huge, mounting, blinding sun.

Mark's hot and misty eyes saw glimpses and snapshots; striving shapes of men, manhandling the guns; shellbursts hanging in the air, then scuttling away before the driving wind; white pillars of water rising slowly, gracefully, into the air; the convoy moving on as if unaware that anything was amiss, and the next ship in the line slowing, stopping. After brief, deafening noise, sudden silence, save for the excited exclamations of men who peered from beneath deeply creased brows.

'Any more?'

'No, I don't see any others.'

'Look, that effer's coming down. No, he's wave-hopping. No, he is coming down. . . .'

Is he? Is he not? Straight into the sun he flies, seemingly under control, but dangerously low. Suddenly, far away, a great splash and, for an instant, the black silhouette of tail-fins.

'Yippee! He's down. I swear that's the effer I was firing at. . . .'

Looking shoreward Mark vaguely saw a gleaming strip: the bright morning light striking on the still inviolate cliffs of England.

'See that land, O'Sullivan,' he said, 'a bit to the westward of that I saw my first aeroplane. That was thirty years ago. I thought it was wonderful. It was doing about forty miles an hour.'

'Uncle, it's a pity somebody didn't poison all those busybodies who designed aeroplanes. They've made the twentieth century unsafe to live in, and from what I can see it's going to get worse. But for those bloody things we might have had a life worth living.'

Destroyers bustled worriedly around the stopped ship. Shoreward, was a little black dot with white plumes before it; the rescue launch hurrying in search of the German. The convoy steamed on.

And at Southend Pier, after the briefest seafaring career on record, Mark was carried ashore with a temperature of over 105. Jock, O'Sullivan and Griffiths called affectionate insults to him from the side, and he tried to grin, but he saw nothing clearly and was unconscious when he reached the ambulance.

CHAPTER 27

MARK came out of hospital in Southampton in November of 1940, recovered from pneumonia but discharged from the Navy, a dejected man. He had made a sudden descent, as in a lift, from a free life into the imprisonment of the war, and did not like the prospect of the years of mob-hysteria which lay ahead, at the end of which, he thought, all alike, friend and foe, would be worse off, save for the wily few. The best thing about his own lot was that it involved himself alone.

That consolation, amazingly, he promptly threw away; for, having counted his money and found that he owned about nine pounds, he dined well, bought a front seat at a theatre, saw Anne Lancaster and acquired a future.

He was forty-five, rich in the kind of experience that impoverishes, and thought himself invulnerably armoured in cynicism. The first sight of Anne captured him as quickly as if he had been eighteen.

The show was the facsimile of a hundred others that popped up each Monday morning in the provincial towns of England. A North Country Comic (dear God, thought Mark, the humour of North Country Comics!), eight Lovelies (at whose first appearance every male playgoer asked himself which had the

shapeliest legs), and a girl who sang the same songs which other girls were singing at the theatre she had left last week and the one she would visit next. But Anne was the girl who sang!

She made him feel like a lamp, rusty and long unused, that has been suddenly lit. The war, the stupid past and the dismal future! To Mark came a revelation: that these familiars of his mind were dullards. This girl was in love with life: then life must be good after all.

Her skin was white against a sequined mauve frock, her hair was honey-coloured, and the limes picked out flashing lights in her eyes, which were already illumined from within by good health and spirits. When her glance fell to the front row, her eyes met Mark's. He felt a mounting excitement. Before the interval came he was resolved to know her.

It was made easy. As the curtain fell the sirens wailed, the applause stopped dead and the playgoers jostled each other to get out. Mark heard the guns begin as he sought the stage-door in the darkness. She was just coming out, this Anne.

'Miss Lancaster,' he said, 'my name is Yeoman. I should have sent my name round. I think you know that. But now I want you to let me take you home. I don't like the look of this.'

She tried to see his face. Then, 'It was you in the front row?' 'Yes.'

Another pause. 'I don't know if I ought to go home. I was wondering if I ought to stay here; perhaps it's safer.' Already the gunfire grew savage and he heard the first droning hum.

'You mustn't stay here. This theatre is old, it will fall down if anything drops even near it. Come, I know a place.'

'Where?' doubtfully.

'A big hotel, not far, with plenty of concrete overhead. Come, quickly.'

Without giving her room for argument he took her arm. His expert eye for cover had noticed the big hotel, earlier. He felt her tremble as the first bomb burst with a quivering thud, not far away. Ahead, they saw in the vivid glow of an explosion a house bulge outward and crash across the street. He pushed her down as he heard the bomb fall; when he urged her on, he found her shaking with laughter. She was gazing at a waxen dummy in a man's shop, a pale-faced, silken-moustachioed thing with

crimped hair, aristocratic features, and glittering gaze, all illumined by gun-flashes and searchlights.

'What's up?' he said, 'what's the joke?'

'Didn't you see?' she said. 'Heavens, I almost saved a bomb the trouble then. I nearly died of fright. I suddenly found that face staring into mine. I thought I was in the next world already.'

Strange spectacle, that night: two scared people who laughed so much that they could not run. Luck went with them, and at last he pulled her through the revolving door of the big hotel. Candles burned, and people stood and sat around, waiting, waiting. Fear was there; the tense feeling of caught breath and unevenly beating hearts. Women knitted or sat with clasped hands, gasping and jumping at every explosion; men paced about. Mark found a corner where a stout wall stood between them and the street and they sat down together, on the floor. The building shook incessantly, and the floor beneath them quivered. Penetrant as water, a faint red glow crept through cracks and crevices, and spread, and brightened, until the whole place was lit: outside the fires began.

'Why do you think we are safer here?' she asked.

'This is a big modern building: steel uprights and cross-pieces filled in with concrete. It's like a pile of safes, heaped on top of each other. No bomb can destroy it *all*. When one has wrecked the top box, it has to begin on the next, and when it reaches the third or fourth it's spent. With a brick-and-mortar building, held together only by putty, the concussion is enough to bring the whole thing down, perhaps even without a direct hit.'

'Are we safe here, then?'

'No, but about ten to one on, I should say. If a big bomb, say a parachute mine, fell on this building, I think we should still be all right here. If one fell in the street outside, we should leave this hotel through the opposite wall. But don't worry, I'm sure we're as safe as houses.'

'Did you say, *houses*?'

'Sorry. Anyway, I think we've found about the best place in Southampton. Did you expect me to come round?'

'Well . . . yes, I did.' She looked at him, as the red glow illumined them. 'You are older than I thought.'

'You are just as old as I thought, if you are twenty.'

'Yes, I am twenty. Why did you stare at me so?'

'Well, the obvious reasons, you know. You certainly don't want me to bore you by talking about them. . . .'

'Oh yes, I do. *Please.*'

'How odd. Well . . . ' and he told her, and she listened eagerly, while the bombs, like pebbles in a pond, set up earth ripples that passed eerily beneath them, and the double reports of the guns shivered the overwrought panes, and an old lady near them knitted, and the red glow flickered and flared and the fear of death lay upon them. When he was done she said, 'You're making me enjoy this night. Am I really as good as that? You only imagine it. I say, this is an awful raid'.

'It is. I should think it's as bad as anything London has had. It'll probably go on all night now.' He made a cushion of his coat for her.

He thumbed over the pages of his life's album for her, a glimpse here and one there.

'You've travelled a lot and done many things, haven't you. I expect you're going to make me feel ignorant and unintelligent. That's the worst of men, either they make a woman feel like their grandmother or their granddaughter.'

'You will never feel that I look on you as my granddaughter, I promise.'

'But it is so. To a woman, men are either like calves, still wobbly at the knees and wet, or insufferably experienced. Ooh, listen to that! What a night! But what do you *do*, Mr. Yeoman?'

'I have done many things, as I tell you. I hope to-morrow will tell me what I'm going to do next. I suppose the only thing I've ever done in my own right was the play I wrote.'

'Are you married?'

'I wondered when you'd ask that. Isn't it odd, if a beautiful young girl were cast on a desert island with a repulsive old tramp, she would ask him within the hour if he were married. No, I'm a widower.' He told her a little of that story.

'And you never married again?'

'Jupiter, no. I wouldn't marry again if I were put on the rack.'

'Have you such a bad opinion of women, then?'

'I think they're revolting.'

She giggled. 'I like that. Do you think I'm revolting?'

'Yes. I think you're lovely.'

She was. He knew that her insides quaked, but she smiled gaily and he admired this enormously. The vital spark that illumines and enlivens the house of human flesh and blood, glowed in Anne with especial brightness. This had first caught his eye: this flaming vitality, this eager and laughing zest. She had on him the effect of sunshine after long winter.

They knew much about each other when the quivering thuds ceased, and the red glow paled in the light of dawn. They got up, stretched, and went out. He looked at her, marvelling at her freshness, and saw that she gazed past him with puzzled eyes.

'Whatever's that?' she said.

Mark turned and, about twenty yards from the hotel, he saw a dull, green-painted canister, as big as himself. Limp silken cords straggled from it to the shapeless ruin of a parachute.

He seized her hand and ever after would maintain that they touched the ground but twice between that spot and the street corner, a hundred yards distant. As they reached it a policeman's head cautiously peered round; at the speed they were travelling, he would have suffered severe, if not mortal injury, had they hit him, and they avoided him only by a Chaplinesque skid.

'Do you see what I saw?' Mark asked the policeman.

'Yes,' he answered briefly, 'I'm waiting for the bomb disposal boys. They're getting the people out of the hotel by the back way now.'

'And we came out by the front,' said Mark faintly. 'Hail smiling dawn.'

'Is it a *bomb*?' asked Anne.

'Anne, do you remember I told you last night that if a parachute mine fell in the road outside the hotel, we should leave it through the opposite wall? Well, that's a parachute mine, and it's about thirty yards from where we were sitting.'

'Ooh. And I felt so safe with you.'

'I wonder you didn't set the bloody thing off by vibration, the way you came galloping down the street,' said the policeman, complainingly.

'Come on, Anne,' said Mark, 'you don't need any beauty sleep, but you ought to have some.'

He took her home, arranged to call for her at noon, and looked

at Southampton. Benumbed people moved about, rescue squads were busy, laden motor-cars made for the countryside, and the trains filled with homeless fugitives. The drama was come to England at last, though even now it lacked the final touch of misery: the added fear of an approaching enemy. These people, though tired, accepted their lot with the inarticulate phlegm of the English; and the invader, at least, still came not.

But in Mark's mind the tragedy of his time had receded to an inferior place, and suddenly his own affairs dominated it. He was filled with an expectant delight, at the thought of Anne. He knew, already, that he would not let her go again. He saw a bright thing that he wanted, in all this darkness, and he meant to get it.

She came to meet him, fresh as a flower, slim in a neat black costume, her head framed by a floppy black hat. They went first to the theatre and found it badly damaged, and all future arrangements suspended. That was favourable, Mark saw, to his purpose; Anne's plans were uncertain.

For the first time in his life, Mark knew exactly what he wanted. They found a restaurant, and ate surrounded by people who still quivered from the shock of the night gone, and with dread of the one to come. Perhaps they were the only people in that town who forgot both nights in a debate about themselves.

Over the coffee, Mark opened his attack.

'Anne, you and I are going to be married, please.'

She looked at him without surprise. 'Why?'

'Because I want you.'

It made no impression. 'Men have asked me to marry them before, as soon as they knew me, but I didn't think you would. I don't take them seriously. I can't leave the company. Why should I marry?'

'Because I want you.'

'Do you know, I should be married now, but for the war. I was engaged to a pilot in the Air Force. He knew he was going to be killed, he told me so. He was one of the first. In fact, I believe the raid he was killed in, on Kiel, was *the* first.'

'Did you love him?'

'I think so. It was all over so quickly. He was young, only a few years older than I, but he was not foolish, like most young men.'

'Well, now you are going to marry me, please.'

'But why? I don't understand?'

'I've told you, because I want you.'

'But that's not an answer.'

'Isn't it! You tell me a better one.'

'Oh, this is ridiculous. I thought you were clever and now you're behaving like a silly boy. Only last night you told me nothing would make you marry again.'

'It? It's a libel. Don't believe a word of it. Nothing on earth could prevent me from marrying again.'

'What is all this about? Are we being serious or silly? I think you have stupid ideas about me. What made you pick on me? There were plenty of other girls on the stage last night.'

'Ah, now you've given me an opening. I can talk for a long time about that. . . .'

'Oh, all right, I asked for that, I know. The trouble is, I like hearing it. At least you're original, you haven't said that you love me.'

'No, I'm careful about words. This is an entirely selfish affair: I want you. I don't say I love you because I don't know what it means. But I know exactly what I mean when I say I want you.'

'Well, what *do* you mean? I don't think I like the sound of it.'

'Then you should. Any woman ought to understand "I want you". I want you for me, and in every way, for many reasons, each one of which I will tell you in time, so that you can't get a word in edgeways. If you like it better, I need you.'

'How, *need* me?'

'For my happiness, my good. I've been tumble-weeding about the world, aimlessly, and suddenly I have an aim. I've missed a lot in life, and I want to catch up. I want to think that even these times can have a pattern, and you give them one. I want the feeling of being alive, and liking it, that I have when you are with me. I want you as a cold man wants a fire and a homeless one a destination. Basta! I think you're lovely and I want you.'

'I don't know whether I'm mad or you're mad, or whether you're in earnest or just drivelling. These times are so strange, one becomes unsure of everything. . . .'

'Then be sure of one thing: that I want you.'

'You worry me. Last night I was happy, and had my work,

and I enjoyed touring, and had lots of boy friends if I wanted them, and then came that awful night, and now you! I don't know why I bother to listen to all this.'

'It was a lovely night. Marriages are made in heaven: that parachute mine came from there and didn't go off when it saw us.' He knew already that she was superstitious.

'It was a miracle, wasn't it? But you're asking me to give up everything . . .'

'Think what you're getting.'

' . . . and why should I? I sing quite nicely, and people like me, and I don't see why I shouldn't get on. And I've worked hard, too.'

All was fair to Mark.

'Anne, one theatre after another is closing down and if these air raids go on there soon won't be any open. Your profession isn't as attractive as you think, just now. . . .'

He kept at her that day, and thrust aside every argument she advanced, and the next morning he resumed his siege. She was growing alarmed.

'Mark, I couldn't sleep last night, you've got me worrying. I feel you're driving me into a corner.'

'That is just what I'm trying to do, Anne, and I won't stop.'

'Oh, this is awful. Why *am* I even bothering to listen? How should we live?' (He had her on the hook then!) 'Are you rich?'

'Sweet Anne, I have about eight pounds in the whole round world.'

'Goodness! I've about fifty, but that wouldn't last long.'

'But that's nothing. I shall write successful plays, when I have you.'

'I think you take all this too lightly, Mark. I don't see how it could possibly work.'

'Why not? The only thing you need to make a success of marriage is to marry a man who wants you as much as I do.'

'But what about the difference in our ages?'

'Anne, I'm prepared to overlook it.'

'Oh, be serious. You don't know me very well. I'm not frightened of anything, but I've Scots blood in me and I'm not going to be rushed into doing anything that's wrong.'

'What's wrong in my wanting you? Experience is the most valuable thing in life, Anne, and think of all the experience you're getting for nothing, when you marry me.'

'If it's the kind of experience I think you mean, I don't much want it. I wish you'd be serious. I feel you take me cheaply, when you joke about this.'

'Then I'll be serious. I just didn't think age important. I want you so much that I won't let you go.'

'I like hearing you say that.'

'Bless you for those kind words. But Shaw said the last word about ages, years ago. In one of his plays a young man wanted to marry a woman much older than himself, and he said, "In a hundred years we shall both be the same age".'

'Isn't it odd how a few words, if they're put in a certain way, can upset opinions that you thought fixed?'

'They just shift the diamond of truth round a bit, so that you see another facet.'

'All the same, you *are* more than twice my age.'

'Don't say another word about it, Anne, I'll not hold your youth against you. To be young happens to all of us, if we're not careful. You needn't wait a hundred years for our graphs to converge: in fifty years, when I'm ninety-five and you are seventy, you won't notice any difference between us.'

'But, why do you want, so suddenly, to marry me, when you were so bitter about marriage, and so resolved never to marry again?'

'Why? Didn't somebody say "Second marriage is the triumph of hope over experience". I have a large stock of experience and want to barter it all for a small cargo of hope. But, above all, Anne, I want you.'

His only weapons were his wits, his word and his determination. He needed three days to overbear her. She yielded inch by inch, her cautious northern blood impelling her to demand reiterated assurances from him before she took this irrevocable and unexpected step. But he knew that she would take it, because he thought no woman could permanently resist the argument he remorselessly used: that he wanted her so much.

'You leave me no choice, do you?' she said at last.

'Not I,' he said cheerfully, 'but think of the satisfaction you

will derive, one day, from being able to say I swept you off your feet and wouldn't take no for an answer.'

On the fourth day they sent a telegram to her only living relative, a married sister, and were married. Mark had taken the precaution to have the licence ready.

CHAPTER 28

'GOOD NIGHT, Anne. God bless you both, and sleep sweetly.'

'Good night and God bless you. We both love you very much.'

Mark lay with his arms round his big wife; sometimes the baby fluttered beneath his hand. He was dreamily making the last circles in the air of wakefulness, before coming in to land on the dark aerodrome of sleep. But he could not get down; the engine of his consciousness refused to throttle back. Anne shifted uneasily. He felt some unequilibrium in her. So that was it.

'Anything wrong, Anne?'

'I am a fool, I shouldn't have eaten all those gooseberries. I've got such a pain.'

'Ah, those big eyes!'

'Anyway, you can't say they're bigger than my belly.'

'I expect baby objects. How would you like to have a pound of gooseberries tipped on top of you, when you were settling down for the night?'

'I know, I am an idiot. It's better now, I think . . . Oh gosh, there it is again.'

'Let me massage you a bit. Is that better?'

'Yes, bless you. I expect it will stop now.'

They lay quietly awhile, then he felt her catch her breath. Suddenly the engine of his brain roared into full wakefulness again.

'Anne, can these be your pains?'

'Oh Lord! No, it can't be, it's a fortnight too soon, at least.'

'Tell me when they come again.'

He timed them by his watch: ten minutes, ten minutes, ten minutes. Crisis broke on him. A week later, they were to have gone to Brighton, to be near the nursing home; that was the doctor's own advice. Now they were caught, at night, in a cottage

five miles from the nearest village. He thought of Sally's labour. That had lasted twenty-four hours, from the first pains. There should be plenty of time. However, he must take no chances.

'Anne, get dressed. I'll ring Rodwall.'

He dashed downstairs and after five minutes a woman's sleepy voice answered:

'Is that you, Mrs. Rodwall? This is Mr. Yeoman. I have to get my wife into Brighton immediately. Can Mr. Rodwall come at once?'

'Ooh dear! What a pity! He's away. Ooh dear! What will you do?'

'Can't someone else drive over?'

'There's nobody else, Mr. Yeoman. I'd come myself if I could drive. Ooh dear. Dr. Smith's away, too, I know that, because we had to get a car to take him to the station this afternoon. Ooh dear. Mr. Yeoman, you telephone my cousin at Straw's Garage in Lewes. He'll do it for you. Lewes 0057, it is.'

Another wait, and then a quiet, unsurprised Sussex voice.

'Straw's Garage.'

'I'm speaking from Little Oaks. I don't suppose you know it, it's a cottage between Almondham and Chelveston.'

'I know it, sir, that's the house facing south, with the white gate and the yew tree.'

'Yes, that's it! My wife's going to have a baby, and she's been taken before her time. I have to get her into Brighton urgently. Can you come?'

'Oh, yes, I think I can manage that, sir. I'll be there as quick as I can.'

'We'll be ready. . . .'

Nearly a thousand days in their lives, blank pages when they met in Southampton, had been filled in. They were happy: Anne was good for Mark, and Mark for Anne. He loved her youth and she leaned on his maturity. He found delight in her beauty, and she treasured the scars on his body: she loved him for the dangers he had passed, and he loved her that she did pity them. She wanted to forge the final link between them, to heal the deep wound in his spirit, by 'making up for Patricia'. She longed for a baby.

They had been lucky. A few weeks after their marriage a cheque for five hundred dollars, for Mark's play, had come from America, and although he never heard anything more from the mysterious patron, and his inquiries remained unanswered, the letter had so much impressed a London agent that the play had been produced at Manchester in the spring of 1941 and had toured the provinces for a year, earning sums which would have established them financially for years, but for the tax collector. However, with this and Mark's earnings from translation work, they were able to live modestly while they waited for the war to end.

They had come to their cottage in the summer of 1942, tired of the over-drugged and over-stimulated mood of London. It was tiny: they had but one large room, a bedroom and a closet. Their windows looked up to the Downs, dim in fair-weather haze or bleakly sharp before rain. They had bicycles and rode on them into Almondham for their meagre rations; Anne, at first, slim and gay in trousers and jumper. The clean air invigorated them: Anne became pregnant during their first week there. She loved every moment of her pregnancy, had never looked so well, or felt (she said) 'so complete'.

Only rarely, when they sat by the fire on autumn evenings, did the foreboding touch her, which women know at such a time. Then she would talk of death.

'Do you think I'll come through all right?'

'Of course you will. You're made for babies. You're bursting with health and you're perfectly shaped for it, you've the right space between the thighs.'

'Have I? I'm so glad. Do you think I'll have a beautiful baby?'

'Indeed you will; look at its father.'

'I've been assuming that baby will have my looks, and your mind, but won't it be awful if it turns out to have my mind and your looks?'

'There ought to be an answer to that, but I'll let it pass.'

A long silence. Then, 'Mark, if anything should happen to me, will you marry again?'

'No. Do you think I'd put my head in the noose again, after all I've been through with you?'

'No, don't joke. I mean it; would you?'

'No, never. But don't worry. We're going to live a long, long while and be always together.'

'I love that. You give me such confidence.' Contented silence, and in the firelight he would see a moist glint in her eye, and would go down on one knee and kiss it away. 'Mark, why must we die?'

'I can't tell you that, my little.'

'I'm afraid of dying. It horrifies me. It makes everything so meaningless. Do you think there's anything afterwards?'

He neither believed nor disbelieved that, for he thought it was vain to hold beliefs about things beyond human understanding. But he said:

'Of course I do. I'm sure of it.'

'And you think we'll be together again?'

'I'm absolutely certain of it.'

'Are you *really*?'

'I'll give you any word that will convince you.'

'I wish I weren't so afraid of dying.'

'Sweet my wife, that's something that all young people go through. It's a thing you grow out of. I can feel at this moment the terror I felt when I was hit. I thought "I'm drowning in black water, and I don't know where I'm going, I'm falling into a black pit and I don't want to go, I must be brave, but I don't want to go".'

'Oh, Mark. And aren't you afraid of death now?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I've grown out of it. It is something that passes, an ailment of youth. Rupert Brooke caught the idea when he wrote of that unhop'd serene which men call age.'

'Do you think I shall grow out of it?'

'Yes, I swear you will.'

'But, Mark, don't die before me. I don't want to be alone.'

'I won't. I come of a very long-lived family.'

'Will you promise to live as long as I?'

'Certainly. You'd make much too attractive a widow.'

Ideally happy months, in a darkling world, these spring months of 1943. Anne bloomed as she swelled. She was proud of her

bigness. The baby was already sexed and named: Patricia. The tiny room was ready. Anne lived in expectant enjoyment of the greatest delight she had known. While the merchants of death, everywhere, claimed the babies of twenty years before, the imminent anticipation of new life vibrated in the lonely little cottage. Everything in it waited for the coming of Patricia. . . .

Anne was deathly white, bit her lips, clung to the bedstead, bent over her pains. He saw these were coming at shorter intervals. 'Now, keep calm,' he told himself, 'flurry won't help her. What can you *do* about it?' Desperately calling back to mind scraps and fragments of things he had heard or read, he put a package of cotton wool in his overcoat pocket; boiled some scissors in a saucepanful of water, wrapped the scissors in gauze, and filled a vacuum flask with the boiling water.

He heard the car, footsteps, the bell.

'Right,' he called to the dim figure outside, 'will you take these cases, and I'll fetch my wife.'

He ran upstairs, took the great pile of folded blankets (hers and the baby's) and helped her down. At the garden gate she had to stop, and double up. Then they had her in the car, and he gave the address to the vague back of the driver.

'And you'll drive as quickly as you can, won't you?'

'Yes, sir,' imperturbably.

He held her arm and the contractions of her muscles communicated themselves to him. He felt the rhythm of her torment. He dimly saw her drawn white face and compressed lips. The black night, obliterating trees and hedges, deprived them of the sense of speed; they seemed to crawl. Then a slight pull on his back told him that they had begun the long climb up the Downs. Another half-hour might bring them to the nursing home. He saw that she gripped a metal rail behind the driver's seat, and felt the quickening beat of her agony.

Suddenly a dim, reflected radiance lit the road, the hedges between which they ran, the car itself. Searchlights sprang into the sky. Then, crash-crash, crash-crash, crash-crash: guns hidden in the folds of these hills barked and barked. He saw their muzzles, straining and recoiling, in the flashes.

'They would choose to-night, wouldn't they, sir?'

'Yes, blast them. Anne, are you all right.'

'Mark . . . oh. Mark, I can't go on.'

'You *must*, Anne. We can't stop here. It's not very far now.'
Crash-crash, crash-crash.

She made no answer. In the flashes he saw her face, her distended eyes, her heaving body. She groaned deeply, and the groan rose into a bitten-off scream. Her fingers pressed into the flesh of his arm, making deep bruises that stayed with him for weeks.

'Anne, beloved, try to bear it. Just until we get there, it isn't far now. Is there anything I can do to help?'

The gunfire grew rabid; somewhere he heard bombs drop and felt the car quiver. She gave a sudden scream, so sharp and piercing that a pang of fear shot through him. He was distraught for her; not since the trenches of 1915 had he been so frightened.

'Mark, I'm sorry,' she said. 'I try to keep quiet, but it's too much for me. Oh, stop, *you must stop*. Oh . . .'

He thumped the driver on the back. 'Stop.'

'Yes, I reckon we'd better stop, sir.'

He sprang out, tore the topmost blanket from the pile and spread it quickly on the floor of the car, feeling the driver come round behind him. At least he could see what he was doing; it was an ill air-raid that brought nobody any good. He was afraid, with an appalling sense of ignorance and inadequacy. His hands shook, and his voice as he spoke to her.

'Anne, lie down. Lie down, lie down.'

They could see everything now, in the reflected glow. They had to manhandle her down, while the searchlights thrust and parried and the shells burst between them, like sparks struck from flashing blades, and the guns slambanged, and the car shook, and through the din came a hornet-like hum-hum-hum. And Anne shrieked between clenched teeth, a rising, chilling scream that was torn from her, while her body arched and thrashed convulsively.

'Anne, Anne, for God's sake try to listen to me. . . .'

'Yes, I'm listening, I can't help making a noise, it's more than I can bear, but I'm listening. What, I'll try . . .'

'Just catch hold of this rail and hold on to the seat with your other hand, and let me try to help you, Anne, my dear. . . .'

'Yes, I'll try. . . .'

'Can I do anything, sir?'

'Yes.' Mark had to gulp for the breath to go on. Then he continued, 'Show that torch here, and hold these until I want them'. He passed over the gauze, with the scissors inside, and the vacuum flask, first pouring some scalding water over his hands. Then he knelt on the floor, had a glimpse of Anne's eyes, tightly closed now, and Anne's mouth, distorted, and leaned with all his weight on one of her legs and reached out his hand, while his heart hammered against his ribs and the guns crashed. . . .'

In the beam of the torch he tried to distinguish between the things he saw, to make sure, in all this fleshy paraphernalia, what was his wife and what was his baby. He could have vomited from the feeling of his own incompetence. Once he had been angry with those people in France who did not know how to stop their daughter from bleeding to death. What sort of a fool was he if he could not help his wife now?

That must be the child's head. As he felt it Anne gave a surging heave and it moved suddenly towards him, so that his hand clearly felt the shape of the back of its head, its neck. Trembling, sweating, unable to see what he did and not knowing what to do, but trying to do something, staring into a chaotic and bloody mess lit by the beam of the torch, he groped and gently grasped and tried to pull and was afraid to pull, and hardly dared even to grasp, and urged and eased and coaxed. . . .

He was terrified of injuring Anne. The noise of her agony deafened him to the din about him and unnerved him. She felt his hesitation.

'Don't worry because I yell,' she gasped in a moment of respite, 'I can't stop it, but it's not you who's hurting me, don't hold back because I yell. Help me, Mark . . . Ah. . . .'

'But you must help, too, Anne,' he said. 'Push, push, if you can.'

He fumbled and tried to take a hold, firm though gentle, and at last, still not knowing what he had done or how he had done it, he did something. He felt the tiny body, wet and slippery, pass into his shaking hands, and the immediate relaxation of Anne's agony and the child yelled even louder than Anne, from the moment he got it out, and he said to himself, 'It's all right, I've done it, it couldn't make a noise like that and not be all right, if only Anne's all right, too. . . .'

He was frightened lest the shaking of his hands, which he could not control, should cause the loss of time vital either to Anne or her babe. In the light of the torch, he took the scissors from the gauze, poured hot water over them, cut the umbilical cord, tied it, and wrapped his slimy infant quickly in blanket after blanket, placing it on the seat for an instant while he packed Anne with cotton wool and covered her with more blankets. Then he took the babe again, patting it, to encourage it to live, and as the noise of death dwindled he was left at the roadside with the puling noise of life in his arms, and an exhausted, deeply breathing Anne. Beneath his hand the child's heart fluttered, birdlike.

He squeezed himself into a corner, pressing the babe close to him inside his overcoat, with his left hand, for fear that the many blankets were not enough for it. His right hand held Anne's. He could not master his trembling, or the catch in his voice. He could hardly tell the driver to go on.

'Now, as quick as you can, *please*.'

'Right, sir.' Not a tremor in that calm voice. The searchlights handed on their unfound quarry to others, further inland, the guns yielded the chase to another, more distant pack.

'Anne, darling,' he said, 'we'll be there soon now, if you can bear up. How do you feel?'

'Oh, I'll manage now, somehow. I'm so worn out. Mark, is it all right?'

'Of course it's all right, can't you hear it, yelling its head off?'

'But that makes me anxious.'

'Sweetheart, you'd have cause to be anxious if it weren't doing that. Don't worry, it's all right.' He hoped he spoke the truth. 'How are you?'

'I think I'll do now. God bless you for helping me. I didn't know what I should do, I thought I'd die.'

'I don't think I helped at all. It would have come, anyway.'

'No, I felt you take it away from me. Mark, I've made up to you for Patricia now.'

'Not quite, my sweet Anne. It's Patrick.'

'Oh! Do you mind?'

'No, I'm glad. Now, don't talk any more. We're getting there.'

At last they arrived. Flurry and scurry and raising of hands

and wide-opening of eyes, in the dim doorway of the nursing-home. Exclamations of compassion, of amazement, of alarm; misgivings professionally masked but quite apparent. Stretchers and smells and hot-water bottles and thermometers. Anne looking with tired and anxious eyes towards the mewling bundle that was her babe. A wash. And then, after a long wait, the doctor, brisk and cheerful.

'Well, I'm very glad to say that everything seems perfectly in order. I don't see any damage at all, or any reason to fear complications. Your wife is a very healthy young woman, Mr. Yeoman. A most remarkable case; not unique, of course, but still exceptional. I congratulate you. I've put her to sleep. You can see her to-morrow afternoon for a few minutes.'

It was still dark when Mark came out and leaned against the waiting car, to steady himself against a violent reaction. He felt for his cigarette case.

'Everything all right, sir?' (That quiet and cheerful voice.)

'Yes, everything.'

'That's good. All's well that ends well.'

'It might not have ended well, but for you. Thanks for turning out.'

'Oh, that's all right, sir, it's all in a day's work. Seems to me you'd have managed well enough at home, anyhow.'

'No, no. It was important to get them here quickly, after it happened. Have a cigarette?'

'Thank you, sir.' (In the light of the match Mark saw for the first time the driver's face.)

'Hullo, it's you, Bob,' he said, 'did you ever play for Sussex?'

The match held aloft and a scrutiny; then, imperturbably, 'Oh, it's young Mr. Yeoman. No, they gave me a trial in the second eleven, but I wasn't good enough. That's a long while ago, sir'.

'Yes, it's a tidy while, Bob.'

'Why, it must be all of forty years since you came to Shepherdsmead with your father, sir. Miss Annie said to tell him she was coming, I remember.'

'That's right, Bob. So you're at Lewes now?'

'Yes, when I came back from the last war I opened a garage there, and did pretty well. Up to ten cars I've had, at times.'

Now they're doing all they can to shut me down. Seems to me, Mr. Yeoman, these Labour Exchange officials, and all the folk that are making themselves so important now there's another war on, they reckon the war's against us British, not the Germans or anybody else. A farce, that's what 'tis.'

'I don't know what I'd have done without you, Bob, and I wish I'd known sooner that it was you. I might have guessed from the name. I'll stay here to-night. I feel like sea breezes.'

'Well, good night, sir. Give my respects and congratulations to your lady.'

Slowly the hours passed until he could go to Anne, and when at last the matron took him to her, and closed the door behind her, she said, 'Do you see I've done my hair for you?'

'Wicked one. Does matron know?'

'Well, she has eyes, so I suppose she does.'

'You look lovely.'

'I'm not even embarrassed. I know I do. I think I look wonderful for a woman who's just produced a baby in the middle of the road in the middle of the night in the middle of an air-raid.'

'So you do, bless you. And you are a wonder, too. You look as if you'd just been to a beauty parlour.'

'Mark, darling, I want to thank you with all my heart for helping me.'

'Not another word, my little. It was a fluke. I put out my hand and the babe stuck in it.'

'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Oh, I'm just being British.'

'Well, don't be. But Mark, he's so *ugly*!'

'Is he? Well, never mind, he'll probably have my brain.'

'Seriously, he's *terribly* ugly. There's a woman in the next room who's just had such a beautiful baby, and they brought it in to show me, and I was so jealous I nearly cried.'

'Let me have a peep at him. Gosh, yes, isn't he awful. Don't worry about that, Anne, it all comes out in washing and ironing. I think he's ravishingly beautiful.'

'So do I, really. But he is hideous, isn't he?'

'I know what all this is leading up to. Everybody who sees him will pause for breath, cast about quite transparently for the tactful tribute, and then say, "Isn't he like his father?" Then, when

he becomes really beautiful, in about a month's time, they'll all say he's like you. There's no justice on this earth. Nobody ever realizes what a man goes through at a time like this.'

And so it was, for young Patrick Yeoman, whose little pate was lit by the reflected glow of searchlights when it popped into the world, whose tiny ears recorded the crash of guns first among the man-made sounds they heard, quickly grew into a golden-haired and chubby-cheeked and lusty boy, who drew cooing sounds from the ladies he met on Sussex roads; and they all said to his mother, 'Isn't he just like *you*!'

CHAPTER 29

ONE day in the autumn of 1943 a small figure climbed nimbly from the bus that halted at the end of their quiet lane and came towards them: spruce and spry, black soft hat rakishly ailt, moustache-ends fluttering, little legs brisk.

'Well, my dear boy!' As if they had parted yesterday, the best of friends. 'Anne, my dear. I've very much looked forward to meeting you. How lovely you are! Is this my grandson? Let me push him.' And a general, retired but unmistakable, pushed Patrick to Little Oaks.

Anne was responsible for this. She had always grieved about Mark's estrangement from his father and urged him to end it, and at last he had yielded. Three years with Anne had softened him. For nearly twenty years the memory of Nelly Yeoman's unhappiness had embittered him, but now he grew more gentle and saw how difficult it was to apportion blame. He began, too, to regret the feuds, rooted in a past he did not even know, which had sundered his family. He was sorry about old albums, which he had angrily discarded, and wished he had kept them for Patrick.

Now he realized that he was glad to see his father, after nearly twenty years. He was the same Appledore: none would have surmised that he approached eighty, and he still watched cricket. The second world war was as indifferent to him as the first.

'Of course, there's only an odd game between Services elevens now. Do you know what they had on the Sussex ground the other

day, Mark? Baseball! Americans playing baseball! My father would have turned in his grave. Rotten game; like rounders.'

'How are they all at Shepherdsmead, father?'

'There's only your Aunt Beatrice now. Annie and Celia died before the war. Old Mrs. Yeoman's still alive, though.'

'What!'

'Yes, ninety-eight, and hasn't understood a word for thirty years. I don't know whether she ever knew about the last war; she certainly doesn't know about this one. Eats like a horse, though, and the doctor says she's organically perfect. She'll outlast us all yet.'

'For heaven's sake!'

'Yes. By the way, your Aunt Beatrice is longing to see Anne and Patrick. I believe they all behaved stupidly when I was ill there, years ago, and you were called over. The Girls always were fools, don't wonder they never found husbands. The Old Boy must have been mad to leave them his money. They lost most of it, quick enough. That waster Dewlap helped them to, in my opinion. There ought to be a Public Trustee for Old Maids.'

'Oh, why worry, father. Ours is the kind of family that's gone to seed since the English began to make a career of gentility, and that's all there is to it.'

'Um, never thought of it like that. I'm not humbug enough to deny that I've wasted my own life. Well, you've found the right wife, it's up to you to restore the breed. But you've a hard row to hoe. They pretend these two wars have been against Germany, but when I look round I think they've been against us. If I were twenty I'd emigrate. I would have done when I was a young man, but for your grandfather. He was too hard with us all. Funny, he must have had a soft spot somewhere.'

'Why?'

'Well, my ridiculous name, Appledore. He called me after a place, somewhere in Devon, I believe, where he spent his honeymoon. He thought I was conceived there. Rum old cove.'

A few days after Appledore's visit to them, a letter came from the last of the Aff Aunts.

My dear Mark,—I was so glad to hear from your father that he had been to see you and your dear wife and little son. I

would come, but I am old and ill. It was such a comfort to me to hear that you are so happy, and are building up a family again. When that tragic accident happened to you I began to think there must be a curse on us all. I have always regretted past misunderstandings, and wish you would bring Anne and Patrick to see me while time remains. Will you? Your Aff Aunt, Beatrice.

Thus, one day, Mark saw Shepherdsmead once more, which he had never expected to behold again. In 1943 there was little he could show Anne of the placid, unworried village of 1904. From the bridge they could still just see Yeoman's Farm, now almost submerged in bricks and mortar. The ivy, with its myriad little hands, was strangling the last life out of it and of the great trees around it, but even now smoke curled upwards from its chimneys, and apparently someone still farmed land there. They could not hear the grumbling of the guns in France, as in 1916, but instead, the continual roar of engines overhead; and everywhere were soldiers, waiting, waiting, for the end of the interminable war, for the invasion of Europe. . . .

An old, old lady in a governess cart, drawn by an enormously fat pony which seemed to sleep as it walked, came towards them.

'Well, Mark, my dear. Is this Anne? You are prettier than my brother said, dear. Your wife is lovely, Mark. Let me see my little darling. But he's so big! Hullo, old chap! Anne, bring him into the trap with me, Mark won't mind pushing the pram along the lane, will you, old chap.'

'No. Aunt Beatrice, you can't make me believe that's the same old tub-cart.'

'Of course it is. They won't let us have any petrol, they don't care about old people nowadays, so we've got the tub-cart out again. I prefer it, I often wish motor-cars hadn't been invented.'

Slowly along the drowsy lane. In Mark's memory it had always been sleepy, in 1904 and in 1916, but with a different sleepiness. Once it was like a young girl sleeping; now its sleep was that of dreary old age. Where were the neat hedges, trim shrubberies, the glowing mansions? Whence came these unkempt laurels, twenty feet high, these untidy paths, rotting fences, shabby villas seen through gaps in the grey and straggling foliage?

Not change, he saw, but much decay. The great cedar tree was dank and drooping, but there was still tea on the lawn, set by a woman who looked like a prison wardress; and when it was ready, and Patrick already crawled on the grass, this woman pushed a bundle in a wheeled chair round the side of the house, and it spoke.

'IS TEA READY?' it said.

'Yes, dear. Mealtimes are the only things she remembers now, Anne. Poor dear, I really don't know what life can hold for her. She's been living in 1910 for over thirty years, it's so distressing. Now here's Patrick's milk. Isn't he grand?' Aunt Beatrice keeps abreast of her times, in 1943 as in 1904. 'Oh, here's Sir Albert.'

'Sir Albert?'

'Yes, Major Dewlap that was, Mark. They knighted him in 1930. Such a *dear* man, but so overworked. He carries the whole burden of the war on his shoulders, here in Shepherdsmead. I don't know *what* they'd do without him. He's chairman of the Emergency Committee, and of the War Savings Committee, and a hundred other things.'

One thing has not changed, since 1904: the fluttering of the nymph at the approach of the bold predatory male is unmistakable. Up the weedy drive come an old gentleman and a youngish vicar.

'This is young Mr. Dewlap, Anne.'

'The clergyman?'

'No, the other.'

'But he's old.'

'Ah no, he is for ever young Mr. Dewlap, Anne. Here is only one tender heart, where once were three, but still it beats faster at his coming, as for fifty years.'

'Here we are. Anne, the Vicar, Sir Albert Dewlap.'

'How do you do, Mrs. Yeoman? Ah, Mark, we meet again. It's a great pleasure for me to meet Mark's wife, Mrs. Yeoman. When was it we first met, Mark? I remember you wore an Eton suit.'

'THIS IS A VERY NICE LITTLE CAKE. I'LL HAVE ANOTHER.'

'About 1904, I think, Sir Albert.'

'Really, was it indeed? Do you hear that, Miss Beatrice? Why, I shall be seventy next year, Mark.'

'Yes, that's going to happen to me about 1965, Sir Albert.' ('You silly old trout, if you think I'm going to say you don't look it, you're wrong.')

'Hm. Ah, yes. Hm. However, I must say I don't feel it. I hear you've been about the world a great deal since we last met, Mark. Now tell me what you think about the Germans. PERSONALLY I think we shall have to occupy their country permanently . . . ineradicable taste for making war . . . slavish mentality . . . We ought to have marched to Berlin last time . . . We shall have to hang Hitler . . . We must see this thing through to the end. . . .'

'WILL SOMEONE KINDLY GIVE ME ANOTHER OF THOSE NICE LITTLE CAKES?'

'What an astonishing appetite!'

'Yes, indeed, vicar, it makes things very difficult. Of course, she doesn't know anything about food rationing and gets very angry if she can't have a second helping of meat. She thinks there's a conspiracy against her. She eats all my meat ration as it is . . . Oh, it's time for the Brains Trust. We *always* listen to the Brains Trust, Anne, it's so informative. Evans, the portable, please.'

Shades of yesteryear; shades of white-clad gods and goddesses on the verdant lawn; of bestreamered Rosie; echoes of clicking croquet mallets; where are you all? All gone. Nothing left but these old drooling people under the decaying cedar tree, and these voices from a box. They cannot even make their own conversation; they have to have small-talk laid on.

'Tut-tut. Joad is infuriating. I really cannot listen.' The radio is silenced, and Mark comes out of his reverie.

'What did he say, Aunt Beatrice?'

'He wants Shaw to be buried in Westminster Abbey.'

'Does he dislike Shaw so much that he wants him buried alive?'

'Oh *no*, dear, he wants Shaw buried in Westminster Abbey when he's *dead*.'

'Oh, I see. Well, what's wrong with that?'

'Mark! Shaw!'

'It would be almost sacrilege, don't you think, vicar?'

'Certainly, most unsuitable.'

'An agnostic. . . .' Mark laughed. 'What is it, Mark?'

'I just remembered something, Aunt Beatrice. When I came here as a boy, in 1904, I used to listen to you all talking, and I overheard you, once, saying something about that awful shore. I used to wonder what shore you meant, and why you thought it was awful. I had nightmares about rocks and quicksands and drowned men and wrecks. And to-day I suddenly realized what you were talking about that day. It was funny to think of you sitting here for forty years, while two world wars have come about, and getting indignant about That Awful Shaw.'

Mark never could control his tongue. There was a wounded pause, cut short by the bundle.

'I SHOULD BE GLAD IF SOMEBODY WOULD TELL ME WHERE CELIA IS,' it said.

Presently Sir Albert once more went down the drive, and the vicar with him, and Anne and Mark set out for Little Oaks.

'Good-bye, my dears. You're fortunate in your wife, Mark. She's a smasher.'

'Aunt Beatrice, where *did* you get that word?'

'I think it was from a broadcast from Scotland, dear. The Scots seem to say nothing else, and I thought it was rather striking.'

'Anne, tell my aunt she's a ripper and you'll be quits.'

'I love her,' said Anne that night, as they lay abed, pleasantly dallying on the shores of sleep.

'Do you? I'm glad. Not that it ever occurred to me to love Aunt Beatrice. But I'm getting more amiable about people.'

'Are you? I'm glad.'

'You should be. You know what's causing it.'

'Yes, I do, and that's why I'm glad. I don't like you to be bitter. But I only love her because, somehow, she's part of you, of your childhood and your troubles, and everything that is you.'

And that was nearly the end of the Victorian pastoral of Shepherdsmead, and of their small part in it. Only once again, the next winter, they went to Shepherdsmead, for Aunt Beatrice's funeral. Old Mrs. Yeoman, shouting 'I SHOULD BE GLAD IF SOMEBODY WOULD KINDLY TELL ME WHERE BEATRICE IS,' sat bundled in her chair and, if she saw, did not comprehend when Beatrice was carried past her in a box. Then they walked across the fields to the old church, where a voice, which might have

been that of a radio announcer if its owner's father had not chosen The Church for his son's career, droned I Am The Resurrection And The Life, Saith The Lord, and Sir Albert blew his nose, and Appledore wiped away an emotional tear and Anne a tender-hearted one, and then Aunt Beatrice was laid beside grumpy old John Yeoman and her frightened sisters.

No more would Sussex know the Yeomans, and it would hardly notice their passing, for they had been but lay figures, tea-drinking automatons, in it since they left their acres. And Appledore was still disappointed of his inheritance.

'Old Bee hadn't a penny, Mark! For years she'd been living on old Mrs. Yeoman. All her own money went in some investments she made about ten years ago. I wish I could afford to pay a detective to find out about those shares, I'll guarantee that waster Dewlap was behind them.'

'Oh, let it go, father.' Mark wondered idly if that, indeed, had been the titbit which young Mr. Dewlap had coveted in years of dancing attendance at Shepherdsmead. He recalled the fluttering of ageing maiden ladies at the coming of that bold man. (Sir Albert, anyway, died, childless, a few months after Aunt Beatrice.)

Appledore showed no sign of that unhop'd serene which men call age; he was as angry about this missed inheritance as he had been forty years before, but laughed at himself a little now.

'I suppose I'm the biggest fool of them all,' he said, 'waiting all these years for their money. Well, the last hope's vanished now.'

That night, after he had gone, Anne and Mark slept when sirens and gunfire awakened them. They went to Patrick's room, and when Mark drew back the curtains it was lit by the reflected glow from the beams and flashes outside, so that he saw his wife's profile, as she leaned over her babe, and Patrick's head on the pillow. The picture suddenly awoke in him a sense of the misery of the time they lived in. He thought of Nelly Yeoman, tip-toeing in to look at her sons, of Madeleine leading him to Pierre. How many mothers, in how many lands, he wondered, at this moment bent over cots and asked themselves, will it ever end, shall we ever feel safe again, even if it ends, or is our world become incurably evil?

When the raiders were gone they lay long awake, listening to

the London barrage, which was like fishwives nagging in the distance. 'In the last war, Anne,' he said, 'when my brother and I were on leave together here in Sussex, we could hear the guns in France, grumbling away just like that. They seemed to say to us, "Don't dare to think that you can call your lives your own". Now we hear the guns of London. What next, in our time, I wonder?'

'Nothing next,' she said sleepily. 'Peace next.' Then she slept, but he lay beside her listening and thinking of their children. For Anne was pregnant again.

Peace, he thought. Would they, of the twentieth century, ever know peace, or were they accursed?

CHAPTER 30

'Oh, Mark, do let's go and see the twitten while we're here' said Anne.

'Right, why not?' he said.

They had gone to Brighton to buy things and it was her opportunity, for which she had often longed, to see his childhood's home. She pushed her babies, fifteen-month-old Patrick and month-old Patricia, up the hill and they turned into the twitten. None but Anne could have brought him to this detested place again; now he was there he found himself looking at it indifferently.

It was June of 1944. The spreading ruin of the new war widened over Europe like a red blot. The coasts where Mark had wandered as a boy, the listless, unready coasts, to which he had returned in 1940, were busy with armies, poised ready to pounce on Europe. The very Front at Brighton was packed with tanks and trucks and guns. England waited now, not to be invaded but to invade. Suspense, and the anguish of women, lay tangible in the air. The twentieth century was claiming another generation.

The twitten was drab, for want of paint. Gnats danced in the sunbeams that lay heavily across the tiny gardens. Only young children and old people were about. The inescapable war disturbed even this sleepy alleyway, for every house had a radio, and from all sides mighty but milksoppy voices, in the glad tones

of curates announcing the Sunday school children's outing, declared that our troops had 'hurled back' a counter-attack here or 'smashed through' a German position there. Thus, wrapped in neat little packets, flavoured to titillate the hearthside taste, the tale of trudge and drudge, of torn flesh and shattered bone, of which Mark knew the truth, was delivered to the folks, at home, of The Boys Over There. Mark saw a big yellow cat raise its head at the sound of the great suave voice, yawn, groom its whiskers, and go to sleep again. The cats knew!

Then he saw the place where his childhood's home had been. Mrs. Loveman's and the Pews' still stood; but the Yeomans' house, like a tooth cleanly pulled, was gone. In one of the walls Mark saw a rusty little grate. When once coals burned in it Nelly Yeoman had sat before it, straining her short-sighted eyes to read, in the *Westminster Gazette*, about the goings-on of That Lloyd George and That Winston Churchill, while she waited for her Appledore.

'Well, that's where it was, Anne,' he said.

'I'm sorry I came now,' she said in dismay. There was, indeed, sorrow in the empty place, a hint of some ominous portent. Let's go,' she said, 'it's sad.'

As they went they passed an old man in shirtsleeves, who sat smoking on a kitchen chair. The fine figure of a man was bent at last, and, at Mark's 'Good morning, sergeant', rose painfully on legs that no longer would spring to attention.

'Why, it's you, Mr. Mark,' he said, 'we thought you'd gone away for good, sir.'

'No, I came back in 1940. This is my wife, sergeant, and this is Patrick, and this Patricia.'

'Good day, ma'am.' Anne smiled. She looked particularly lovely. The shade of Sally, standing beside her, no longer had power to mock him; he might mock Sally, now.

'Ah, me and the missus, we've often talked about you, Mr. Mark. It was a sad business for you about my poor girl and your Patricia.' He did not mention Roger, and Mark wondered how much he knew. 'I'm glad to see you've another family,' and Sergeant Sud put out a wrinkled forefinger, which young Patrick grasped with the confidence which the likes of Sergeant Sud always inspire in babies.

'How is Mrs. Sud, Sergeant?'

'Ah, she'll be sorry she wasn't here, sir. She's in hospital, and I'm afraid she'll be there a long time yet.'

'I'm very sorry. Please tell her I asked. I see our house has gone.'

'Yes, an incendiary that was, Mr. Mark. When we got it under there wasn't enough left to repair, so they pulled it all down. That Mr. Churchtower, that took over the house when you went, he lost all his furniture, and what a fuss he made about it! Went round saying that if England hadn't started the bombing, Germany wouldn't have retaliated. And him a senior warden, too. He was a queer chap, I never could make him out. Always seemed something foreign about him to me.'

'I haven't seen any faces I remember, sergeant.'

'I don't think you will, sir. They're a new lot here now, and a poor lot, too. Communists, they call 'emselves, most of 'em. Big mouths and no brains, and too much easy money. We'll have some trouble after this is over, I shouldn't wonder.'

'What do you make of it all, sergeant?'

'Why, I reckon Mr. Hitler's sorry he started it, now, sir. I've got a bet on it'll be all over by Christmas.'

'H'm. I seem to have been hearing those words all my life. Does old Mr. Wily still come round?'

'Ah, him. No, he died a few years back, sir, 'n left a pile of money. In his will he said he wanted to be cremated cheaply, because he didn't hold with spending a lot of money on funerals and burials.'

'No! Then he had his little joke up his sleeve all the while. Well, good-bye, sergeant.'

'Good-bye, sir. Good-bye, ma'am. . . .'

They went away, to the grim front, with its empty shops and peeling paint and rusty barbed wire and deserted hotels and suspended future. Mark thought of Mafeking revelry, of pierrots and Len Blazer (did that devilish fellow still wander round England, an ageing pantaloon, on the fringe of some shabby touring company?), of maimed and limbless, but still gay throngs in the other war — and this!

As they came to the lifeless pier they suddenly heard eerie, maniac laughter. Startled, they looked about and saw that it

came from a dummy, dressed as a sailor, in the window of a wax-works. By some ingenious mechanism it opened its mouth and threw this crazy, bloodcurdling, cackling laughter out over the empty Promenade.

The laughter suddenly ceased, and they heard the Voice, as of some stupendous shopwalker, which breathed o'er England day and night in this twentieth century. Slightly less suave than usual, it said, 'Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France. . . .'

'God, Anne, it's come at last.'

'The invasion?'

'Yes, we've begun it.'

They stood and looked at each other, on the front at Brighton. Like all Englishmen and Englishwomen they had been walking in a tunnel for nearly five years, and sustaining themselves, consciously or subconsciously, with the thought that one day they would come to the end of it and into the daylight. Life, suspended for so long, would begin again; but first must come something called 'the invasion of Europe'. They had lived with this thought for so many moons that they could scarcely recognize the reality now they were face to face with it.

'So that was it,' said Anne, looking up at the crowded sky. They had wondered, casually, at the incessant uproar of engines during the night. Now hundreds of fighters and bombers flew overhead, south-westward bound.

Mark looked across the inscrutable water and saw in its grey-ness a vision of little rows of Englishmen climbing out of trenches on the Somme and at Passchendaele, and then rat-a-tat-tat, and down they went, scores of thousands of them, hundreds of thousands of them, and at the end of it all nothing gained, only a victory that crumbled in the hand and proved to be defeat. He saw the babes of the 'nineties rising, and turning their faces towards each other in the dawn or dusk of Flanders or France. Now *their* sons met.

'Once more, Anne,' he said, 'once more. It's nearer this time, it's going on only a little way from here, only this stretch of water is between us and it. And when it's over, when some have "won" and the others have "lost", who will have lost and who will have

won? None of those, on either side, who are fighting each other now, across that water, I think. My lord Disraeli's "people behind the scenes", perhaps; no others will have gained anything. And will they allow us to have a little peace, at last? We've only about half of this century left; will it be saner, or madder than the first half?"

'I don't know,' said Anne, 'and I don't much care. I can only think of our boys over there. I don't care about the past or the future, I just want them to come back to their wives, and homes. I know they can't all come back, but I want them all to come back. I'm not interested in anything else.'

Mark looked around him. Above, endless trains of gliders, towed by engined aeroplanes, moved smoothly towards the battle in France. People who had stood to hear the news went on their way with grave faces, and said little to each other. Suddenly he thought how different they were from the people he had seen on this very spot at Mafeking time, from the crowds he had seen before Buckingham Palace in 1914, in Berlin in 1939. There was no vulgar excitement in these people. In its place, at this moment at least, was an almost religious earnestness.

'I'll tell you one thing, Anne,' he said, looking about him, 'the mob is learning a little something at last, I do believe. They're not yelling themselves hoarse from long-distance heroism, like they used to. I've seen the mob in all its orgasms from 1900 until now, either here, or in London, or Berlin, or Vienna. They're not shouting "Go on, boys, over the top and the best of luck to you, good old Monty, good old Winnie, good old Joe"'. They're quiet, sober-minded, sceptical. Do they at last begin to see the hoax? I doubt it. But I think they're getting tired of these politicians' beanfeasts, called war, at last. God, when I think what's happening on the other side of that water!'

Near them soldiers, with sober faces, stood by their tanks and trucks and listened to the news. When it was finished they bent to their work again, without foolish comment. Then, suddenly, the crazy, cackling laughter began again.

Mark swung round. The dummy, with its great gaping mouth, was rolling and racking itself with laughter as it faced the busy sea.

'That's the sound I hate and fear,' he said, 'that's mob. Look

at it, listen to it. There's a symbolic tableau for you, Anne: the English attitude towards the twentieth century.' He pointed towards the screeching manikin, which looked towards deserted beaches, barricades, an imprisoned pier and the forbidden sea. 'That water was our blue road to freedom: now, it's a prison wall, and when shall we emerge from it? Twice between 1900 and 1950 we've got ourselves into this mess. Assume that our soldiers storm the beaches over there, climb the cliffs, smash the enemy — win this war! What then? Are those men who rule the world behind the scenes going to let us live in peace for the rest of this century, or are they going to make another war? That's where our future, yours and mine, Anne, and Patrick's and Patricia's, is really going to be decided, Anne: not across the Channel, on the beaches of Normandy, that's all bluff, but *here* — here in England. Isn't it enough to make a waxworks dummy laugh, when he sees all men's eyes gazing across the Channel? It's the same old trick. Didn't The Boys win last time, and has it given us peace, or freedom?'

'Oh, *don't*, Mark,' she said.

'I must, I can't help it,' he said angrily, 'I see through the swindle, if this dummy and I are the only two creatures in the world who do. The last war was only twenty-five years ago, and where is our victory now? What was clean or honest about that war except the courage of the men who fought? To-day perhaps the greatest battle in the world's history is going on, just across the water from us. How do we know that it isn't just another politicians' hoax? All the signs point to it. We know already that our gallant Russian allies intend to annex half the territory of our gallant Polish allies, who have been fighting "Fascism" twice as long as they. Isn't that the same swindle all over again, that began in 1919? ...'

'Come,' she said patiently, 'I won't believe it.'

Behind them, as they went their way, and their babies gazed upward round-eyed at the roaring air-fleets that went to France, the dummy in the waxworks window laughed and laughed and laughed. You could have sworn that it lived, that it looked through its window across the front at the rusty wire entanglements and the mined beaches and the deadly sea, and thought of what was happening on the other side, and of the things that were

being said about 'liberating Europe' and 'overthrowing dictatorships' and 'making the world safe for democracy', and just could not help laughing, laughing to split its sides. . . .

CHAPTER 3 I

WITH loud clatter, Anne, in scarlet dungarees, came flying downstairs, her hair fluttering aureole-wise, dashed into the garden, and, as Mark stood up to see what went on, took a flying leap towards him, clutching him round the neck while he caught her legs in either arms.

'Mark' she said, 'I'm so happy. I'm as hungry as a bear, the sun's shining, I love you, and I want to breed like a rabbit.' Anne's high spirits were wont to explode in this manner.

'Man of letters meets woman of litters,' said Mark, staggering and putting her down.

'Oh, you are a weakling. You never carried me over a threshold even when we were married.'

'My dear Anne, you are what the county ladies call a fine gel, in figure, and I see nothing romantic in a small man, with sagging knees, tottering over thresholds with a large female in his arms. You ought to carry *me* over thresholds. It's high time men had some of these rights. What's this about breeding like a rabbit?'

'Oh, I just put Patricia to sleep, and she was so lovely, and then I looked out of the window at Pat, and I was so happy, and then I looked at you, and I want another baby. Wouldn't you like another?'

'I'd like dozens. But what are we going to do with all these children. We already live almost in a shoe and don't know what to do. . . .'

It was the spring of 1949 and they waited, the four of them, for their emigration papers to be completed. They were going, as soon as they could, to South Africa, in search of the future which duped and battered Europe no longer offered.

They had lived through many bitter winters, and had hoped for better things each time the golden parade of crocuses began

to march round the yew tree and on their mellow roof the birds sought lichen for their nests. But in the affairs of men came no springtide.

Was the very war over, in 1949? If it was, it had served only the causes it was ostensibly begun to defeat, and peace could not be recognized in the bellicose argument that had been going on ever since.

Freedom? There was less freedom than ever, either in mainland Europe or in island England. Democracy? Despotic military dictatorships, which ruthlessly denied all human dignity, ruled over more of Europe than ever before, simply calling themselves 'Popular' instead of 'National Socialist', or 'Communist' instead of 'Fascist'; for the enslaved, there was no difference. The liberation of small nations? Why, before the war of liberation began, in 1939, only two or three of these had been overrun, but in 1949, when it was supposed to have been victoriously ended, six or seven had been annexed or partitioned. Europe was less free than in 1939, than in 1914.

In 1949 men looked towards America as the last hope of the thing they had been taught to call white civilization. There traces of the ideal called liberty still flickered; the fire was not out, and could yet be revived, by strong hearts and willing hands. But the danger grew, that the second half of this momentous twentieth century would see the end of Europe as it had been known: that some new tyranny was arising which in its features might be black or brown or yellow, in its soul Asiatic or oriental, in its methods more ruthless than the Roman conquest on which Europe's own vaunted order was founded; but would certainly pass over the Europeans and leave them nameless bondmen, creatures as dim and dull and prideless, in the eyes of posterity, as the chariot-harnessed slaves of an Egyptian carving. In the light of the years from 1900 to 1950, the years between 1950 and 2000 looked menacing indeed.

What did that matter to Mark? Ah, his children made it important. That was why he was going to South Africa. . . .

'Do with them?' said Anne in answer to his question. 'Why, bring them up to be fine and strong, like Pat and Patricia, of course.' She had no doubts about the future at all. 'Would you like another boy or another girl?'

'Either. I was only thinking about their future.'

'Look, Mark, how often did we stand at their bedside, wondering whether the next moment would be their last, and I felt such bitterness and rage, only a woman could understand what I felt. But they were spared. We're all alive, and we're going to a new country, and I want another baby. I want to go somewhere where the sun shines and there's a little air left to breathe. Here in England we are being stifled.'

'Isn't it odd, Anne, when I was a boy the Irish emigrant was the symbol of the poor, disinherited, homeless patriot, driven across the oceans by oppressors at home. Now the turn of the English comes.'

Anne, with loving art, fought a great fight against the bitterness which was the birthwrong of Mark's generation. She gave him everything he needed. What he gave her, he did not trouble to analyse, but seemingly it pleased her.

'Well, Anne,' he said, 'if you really want yet another child, who am I to demur? I'll sacrifice myself, once more, to your wishes.'

One day, a few months after this, Appledore came to see them, and sat in the garden talking to Mark while Patrick and Patricia, beneath the yew tree, played civil war, ambushing each other and executing each other: such was *their* heritage.

'So you're taking them away, Mark,' he said, 'and I think you're right. I'd like to live long enough to see what comes of all this madness, but I won't now. They'll have a better chance in another country. Here we're like sheep without a shepherd, just pushing against each other.'

'What else can I do? What is there for them in England, but impoverishment, no matter how hard they work, regimentation, no matter how they long for liberty, and probably a third war to round off the cycle.'

'I wish I'd taken you and Patrick and your mother away, years ago. I'd like to think of you starting a new breed of Yeomans somewhere. It would make me think my time hadn't been quite wasted.'

'Do you think it has, when you look at Pat and Patricia?'

'By jove, you're right there.'

Anne appeared at the cottage door, calling. The children ran

in, and Mark and his father heard the laughing tumult of the five-minutes-before-bedtime. Then there was silence, and a pause, which, Mark knew, meant that Anne was patting her hair, powdering her nose and putting on her freshest frock, before preparing supper for them. Then she came down, smiling and pleased with her looks, and said:

'Did Mark tell you that five of us are going to South Africa, Mr. Yeoman?'

'Anne, my dear, do you know, I wondered . . .'

'I saw you did, Mr. Yeoman, that's why I mentioned it.'

'Bless your sharp eyes. Well, well! Anne, you don't look old enough to have one child, let alone three. Mark, you seem to be making a good start with the new breed here, without waiting to get to South Africa.'

'Oh, this is just a little something on account. You see, Anne finds me physically attractive. . . .'

'You . . .'

'Now, Anne, don't excite yourself. Remember your condition.'

CHAPTER 32

'Not forebe the renchild, father,' said Mark, as Appledore, exclaiming 'Damn and blast!' scuttled after his hat, torn from his bald head by the blast from a blue, twin-engined tourer which taxied round near them and, with the fierce roar of opened throttles, raced away across the airfield.

'Oh, Mark, why didn't you run after it? After all, he's eighty-five!'

'He wouldn't have liked that. Does he look eighty-five? Watch him run. You know, Anne, there must be some good bone and gristle and a good pump, in the Yeoman species.'

'What was that you said to him?'

'Not forebe the renchild? Just simple backslang. It means, not before the children. It was the gibberish Victorian parents used. Backslang was the verbal equivalent of the laurel hedge. Both were used, by our fond ancestors, as fortifications against the facts of life. In 1950, Anne, you see how much both availed.'

Appledore, chased by Pat and Patricia, who yelled with laughter, caught up with his hat and came back to them. Save that he seemed smaller, he was much like the Appledore of 1900. His moustache measured full six inches. His well-shaven cheeks, through which the bones now sharply showed, shone a little from soap and razor, as Mark remembered them shining on Mafeking morning, fifty years before. His eyes were still keen; he wore no glasses and heard perfectly; he was brisk and sprightly.

Somewhere, somehow, he still lived his little life: ate enough, was sufficiently clad, lay warm during his sleeping hours and seemingly enjoyed his waking ones. Like Mr. Micawber, he would have lauded thrift, and had not been less happy than most in eighty-five years of thriftlessness. He was unchanging and unchangeable, Pip Yeoman. Still his eye roved longingly towards the nearest inn, still that eye was sometimes glazed: Mark wondered how he did it, for the liquor which was now sold would have slid shamefacedly from any duck's back.

When he went to Shepherdsmead, to lie beside the Old Boy and the Girls, they would not follow him, for they would be far away. Around them London Airport was busy. Departures and arrivals, leavetakings and welcomes, gave to the scene that tingling sense of quickened human emotion which once had been found only in the greater seaports. Huge multi-engined air-liners came droning in from the Americas, others roared away to India and China. Great flying-boats alighted, between high, curving waves, on the artificial lake a mile away. Much higher-toned than the noise of the engine-driven monsters, came the piercing whine of the jet-propelled craft, and in the sleek, excrescenceless shapes of these, as they flashed about, Mark saw that man's conquest of the air was at last being crowned by beauty. Cargo-trucks and baggage-trucks moved to and fro between the bellies of the air-liners and the great airport hotel. Towards it came throngs of travellers, and before it others waited to embark. Behind, the smooth electric trains passed each other, bound Londonwards, or coming from London to the airport station, built beneath the hotel. On the control tower, the busy movement of port officials; everywhere the toiling shapes of men, who loaded and unloaded bales and cases; and in the midst of all this, Anne, Mark, their three children and Appledore.

'Passengers for Cape Town, please.'

'Then, good-bye, father.'

'Good-bye, grandfather.'

'Good-bye, Patricia, good-bye Pat. Good-bye young feller; by Jove, I believe he knows me. Good-bye, Anne, my dear, and God bless you all. Good-bye, Mark. Cable me when you land, and write often.'

In Appledore's eye a tear. They clustered round the window of the saloon, looking back and down. For a moment they saw the old gentleman, waving, and they waved to him, Pat and Patricia calling 'Good-bye, grandfather', as if he could hear them. Then the crowd below was but a mass of tiny, unidentifiable figures; then the airport was a receding doll's town; then they had a rotating glimpse of London, with bomb-gaps still showing; then there was beneath them a flat, drably-coloured map, uninhabited, meaningless. They were in a blue void, tinselled with golden specks by the sun, which with secret alchemy found even in this emptiness something to gild. Once again, after many years, Mark felt the awed loneliness which airfaring had always induced in him, a loneliness which seemed, to his nature, deeper than any the seafarer knew.

'What are you thinking of, Mark?'

'Oh, of many things. Of the first aeroplane I ever saw, not so long ago, either. Look, that tiny thing down there is Brighton; it was near there. I'm thinking that when I came out of the war (you know, Anne, that old war) I swore I'd never fly again. I'm thinking how I've longed to see Table Mountain ever since I was a boy. I always imagined seeing it over the prow of a ship; soon we shall see it through this window. I'm thinking how fortunate the children are, to start their lives like this, with the hope of freedom and opportunity before them.'

'I hope they'll come back to England one day, though. I was thinking how I love it, Mark. I don't want to stay and I'm glad I'm going; but it's like an operation, to leave it. A piece of my heart is chipping off and parachuting down.'

'I know. I could take it in my arms.'

'Now that it's going I can hardly bear to let it go. It makes me think of my father, whom I never knew, and the things my mother told me about him, and of her, and of the drab little

house we lived in, at Wallasey. How we detested it. But I love it now. All the bad times and the bad things suddenly look good to me now.'

'It's your blood and your heart speaking, Anne. But we had to go, so say good-bye to England. You always said you couldn't understand maps; well, now's your chance, you can see the shape of England. It looks as if you could lean down and pick it up. Say good-bye, Pat, Patricia, and say good-bye for Miles, too.'

'Good-bye,' they said obediently; Miles slept peacefully in his carry-cot.

'I wish your father could have come, Mark. I should have liked him to end his days with us and the children.

'So would I. And I think my mother would have liked it, too. It would have made her smile happily, and she would have thanked her good God for making all come well.'

They looked back at the dwindling island, while Mark thought of Appledore. A few more afternoons at the cricket, a few more glasses. . . .

'Well, that's good-bye.'

'I wonder how they'll get on, bless them.'

'Who, Anne?'

'Our people, down there.'

'Oh, soon they'll revive *Cavalcade*, and the men will put on white shirts and ties and the women evening frocks, and they'll roll up in hordes to see it, and it will tell them that if they only keep on going nowhere, just as they're going, they'll be sure to get somewhere, and the curtain will go down on an upraised glass of champagne and a toast being drunk to Mightier Yet (at no trouble or expense to themselves, of course) and they'll cheer themselves dry and go home to Golder's Green feeling they've struck a doughty blow for England, and one day, suddenly proclaiming that Freedom is in peril, they'll fight another war, and any links that then are still missing from the chain of enslavement will be forged, and that will be about the end of Europe, I opine. And there is Europe. . . .'

The wing cleared the narrow blue lane, and a widening brown strip came into view.

'... Yes, there it is. Not much to look at, from here, is it,

Anne? You wouldn't think it lived. What a mess they've made of it, with their two wars against tyranny and for freedom. There never was so much tyranny in Europe before, not under Napoleon, the Tsars, or the Sultans. More of that continent down there is under the rule of terror and tyranny than *ever* before. . . .

'Mark,' she said, 'you've lived too close to these things, you see only the evil. If we hadn't night, we shouldn't know what day was.'

'But think how many millions of people have been destroyed, in the name of God and the right, in these last forty years; we can't even guess within ten or twenty millions, how many. When was there ever anything like that before? Think how many times as many souls have been destroyed. Think of the mass of disbelief that exists to-day where faith was fifty years ago, and imagine what the world will look like in the year 2000, if this goes on.'

'Don't be sad now,' she said, 'away with the Old World, on to the New. I still think you will be proved wrong. I think you're a bit fey, Mark.'

'Fey? That means, excited by a premonition of impending death.'

'Oh, I would choose the wrong word. I meant just batty. You've been sitting there, looking down at Europe with such a rabid glare in your eyes, I expected you to get up and run round the saloon on all fours, barking and trying to bite the stewardess.'

'She *has* rather an appetizing calf. But I was thinking, Anne, just about fifty years ago to-day was Mafeking, and I've always had a feeling that all these troubles, to which we see no end, began then. It was in 1900, right at the beginning of this senseless century, which gets madder as it grows older, and looks likely to leave us all scratching ourselves in caves, and I can still hear the mob, drunkenly shouting, that day. Ever since I've lived with mobs, which cheered louder each time some new Pied Piper came to lead them to death, destitution, poverty, famine, disease and slavery. Good old Bobs, good old Joe, good old Lloyd George, Hoch der Kaiser, good old Baldwin, good old Ramsay, Evviva il Duce, Heil Hitler, good old Neville, good old Joe, good

old Winnie . . . so they howled as they rode by in the tumbrils . . . What?’

‘I was only asking, Mark’ she said, ‘do you think we can have some tea now?’

‘Yes, of course. Isn’t it odd how Englishwomen reduce every human problem in this same wet, brown and warm formula: a cup of tea.’

‘Yes, and now that I’ve managed to interrupt you, let me get a word in edgeways. I just want to tell you, Mark, you’ve seen many things and know much, but I know more than you. I think your fears are tommy rot. We live in a bad time, but a good time must come some day. I agreed with you that it would be good for us and for the children to go to a new country, but if you think that England and Europe are going to collapse in ruins, you’re just batty; you ought to take an aspirin.’

He was quiet for a moment. ‘Good Lord,’ he then said, ‘I wonder if you’re right.’

‘Of course I am,’ she said, ‘and now let’s have tea.’

While they drank it he looked down at the dull map below, From this height the human comedy disappeared, there was no human comedy, just the blank surface of the ageless earth, and what matter if men or microbes crawled on it? Battling armies, fugitives, death and destruction, famine, destitution and despair: what were such words up here? How absurd it seemed to worry about this jagged, colourless fragment called a continent. Jeanne, Erika; Pat and Sally; Mons, Dunkirk; hope, fear; illness, health; poverty, wealth; truly, he saw, mankind lived in vain dreams and purposeless ambitions. Climb a few vertical miles and the sham lay bare.

In the far distance he saw the altar on which the young men of his own generation had been sacrificed, the Western Front. He thought of his brother, and the hair rose on his head, even now, at the thought of their last flight together in 1916. He thought of Pierre: in 1945 a letter had reached him from Madeleine to tell him that the boy had been killed in May 1940, a few days after Mark’s dinner with him. Patrick’s son, like Patrick, had been killed at the age of twenty-three. He wondered what Erika was doing; he felt no resentment against that vixen now. And Jeanne! He pictured Jeanne, an ageing woman bowed with the

griefs of her times, with the hardships of repeated flights from invading armies, with the misery of peace ever denied.

Resolutely he thrust these thoughts away, turned from the window, and faced the future, which was gathered round him.

Anne, at thirty, was mature and lovelier than she had ever been; proud of her children and zestful for them. He looked at her and reflected that, if all life were shadow, he had picked that shadow's pocket and stolen a little substance for himself; for his ten years with Anne were tangible gain, of which the shadow could never again deprive him. The sum of the days and nights they had spent together (and hardly one apart, in all those years) of the happiness they had given and taken, and of the fears they had shared, those many times when they stood by their sleeping babes and listened to the bombs and gunfire, all added up now to a great compound balance of passionate content, in which even the nights of dread, now survived, were items of credit.

'Anne,' he said, 'you're lovely.'

'I think I am, rather,' she said, 'but it's through you.'

'No, it isn't. You always were.'

'You've kept me like it and improved me.'

'Oh well, of course, I set out from the beginning to improve you. But I loved you even at the start, with all your faults. . . .'

'I know what's coming, don't tell me. I don't know how I know, but I know. Anyway, you badly needed the influence of a good woman, when I met you.'

'I must try it some time.'

Pat and Patricia, having gravely inspected the other passengers and made friends with the stewardess, came back to them, saying, 'Daddy, can we do our diary now?'

'Yes, come along.'

They solemnly observed this rite each day of their lives. For ten years, Mark had kept a diary, bound in red or blue or green leather, but otherwise always alike. Each evening, before the children went to bed, they filled in the past day in family conclave: Mark wrote and pasted in snapshots, Anne listened, Pat suggested improvements, Patricia recommended long words.

Now, while Miles slept, they gathered round him. Anne smiled across the table at him; Pat watched over his right shoulder and Patricia over his left. He took the slim green book out of his

travelling case, his fountain pen from his pocket. The muffled roar of the engines came to them through the hull. Outside, the sun mounted to its zenith. Below, the map, drawn by an invisible hand while they hung motionless in space, passed slowly by. Already the wing cleared the coast of the Mediterranean and left a broadening edge of blue behind it.

His mind was tossed with thoughts and memories. How placidly his children accepted all this; how new it still was to him. The inner Mark Yeoman was still the boy who had stood on the cliffs with Pat and dreamed of foreign lands; at fifty-five he felt exactly the same thrill of excitement within himself. It was May, Mafeking month. Soon they would fly over Mafeking, or nearly. How much had happened to him in those fifty years. What would the next fifty bring?

He smiled at them. 'Well, God bless us all,' he said, and bent over the album. He drew, in the middle of the page, a black silhouette of an aeroplane flying into the sun. Beneath that, he wrote *The Next Horizon*. Anne leaned across and looked.

'What does that mean, Mark?' she said.

'First, that I love you all,' he said, 'and next, just something that came into my mind. It seemed appropriate, to this day. I once had a sergeant, a Geordie, Sergeant Wellhouse. He was a regular soldier, a man of cantonments and bivouacs. He was killed at my side, in the trenches near Ypres. Shrapnel hit him in the head, and, like many others, he was supposed, by getting in the way of it, to have made the world safe for something. He used to tell me tales of peacetime soldiering, and among them was an anecdote of his service in Ireland. In those days, before you were born, Anne, British soldiers garrisoned Ireland. His regiment used to go for long, long route marches, and would get footsore and weary and sometimes they would call out to an old Irish peasant, who watched them from his field, "How far is it to Curraghmore, Mick?" And the old man would answer, "Just over the next horizon". That amused and irritated the English soldiers. It showed them how silly the Irish were, for everyone knew that you could never reach an horizon. They forgot that the Irishman knew that as well as they, and took this way of getting a little of his own back on the Englishmen. Now, I liked that phrase, *The Next Horizon*. It stuck in my mind, like a burr,

and came to stand for a philosophy of life which I like. You know that you can never reach an horizon, but you keep your eyes fixed on one and keep on going on, for the sake of keeping on and striving. It was the philosophy that led me to you, Anne, and to these three, and so I love it.'

The wing-tip cleared the southern coast of the Mediterranean, and behind the blue appeared a widening yellow strip: Africa. 'Look,' he said, 'the desert. Do you remember that film we saw, years ago, during the war?'

'Desert Victory?' said Anne. 'Oh yes, I couldn't forget it. I was so proud of our men. For the first time we saw some hope of peace and a future for our children, that night. I was so happy, going home with you in the bus, in the black-out. I thought, there *is* going to be light again one day, after all!'

'Well,' he said, 'there it is, the battlefield. Who thinks of it to-day, or of that famous victory? Or of the Boys who lie beneath the sand?'

'I do!' she said, angrily, 'and *you* do. You're wrong, Mark, it isn't all waste. They were fine men, the best, and everybody praised them when they died. And we're the proof that they *did* achieve what they died for. Aren't we alive, and free, and flying over the old battlefield, where they fought for England, to a new land, where we'll live in the way they loved, and bring these three up the same way?'

Mark looked thoughtful. 'Fine men, the best, and everybody praised them when they died!' he said. 'You've an excellent taste in words, Anne, I couldn't better that. When I look back I think there are none as good as the best of our fellow-countrymen. I remember some: brave, gentlemen, quiet and smiling, staunch and unboasting. They've endured and striven so much, it's sad to think their world is in a worse mess than ever, after fifty years of it. . . .'

'It *isn't*, Mark. You always look so far in your search for truth, you overlook it when it sits beside you. We're the proof that it's all been good and worth while.'

He smiled at her. 'If my own happiness and good fortune are your witnesses, Anne,' he said, 'I stand convicted of being as wrong as I could be, God bless you.'

Far below, the tiny shadow of their craft passed smoothly over

the still and empty desert. The sun struck into the saloon and illumined the fair heads of Anne and her children. Mark turned to his work. He underlined the heading, *The Next Horizon*, and began to write.

Southward bound, the aeroplane roared on, towards Table Mountain, the Cape of Good Hope, the future. . . .

THE BEGINNING

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